

LIL WAYNE: ALBUM OF THE YEAR? BLENDER

**JACK
BLACK**
BRINGS
THE
THUNDER

"No matter how great things are going, I still feel like the outsider."
pg. 56

**CHRIS
MARTIN**
"WE OWE
RADIOHEAD
OUR
CAREER"

WTF HAPPENED TO ...
MÖTLEY CRÜE
BUH-BYE,
BOOZE;
HELLO,
LATTES

DATING TIPS
FROM
KATY PERRY

DRINKING
TIPS FROM
**THE HOLD
STEADY**



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FEATURES

56 JACK BLACK

The Tenacious D frontman—and star of the new Vietnam-flick spoof *Tropic Thunder*—sits down for a revealing interview about fatherhood, his druggy past and why he sometimes feels like Frankenstein's monster.

63 PLAY: MUSIC AND GAMING

Screw summer barbecues! *Blender* celebrates the indoor life with our annual gaming special, featuring Aerosmith, *Madden* and legions of karaoke freaks!

70 CONOR OBERST

Mr. Bright Eyes steps out with a new solo disc recorded in a makeshift studio on a Mexican mountainside. "I don't want to live in a box," he says. "I'd like to never have any idea what a box is."

CONTENTS

08.08

"I NEVER
FEEL LIKE I'M
PLAYING A
CHARACTER.
I'M JUST
BEING
MYSELF—
MAYBE A
SLIGHTLY
DUMBER
VERSION OF
MYSELF."

—JACK BLACK

PHOTOGRAPH BY GAVIN BOND



CONTENTS

08.08



REGULARS

9 BLENDER BIBLE

14 LETTERS

19 BURNER

Fergie, Mariah and Lily Allen go for the gold!

24 ASK BLENDER

The secret behind Pete Wentz's hair

26 USEFUL TIPS: KATY PERRY

The sassy singer on how to juggle four guys

30 ALMOST FAMOUS: SHWAYZE

Look out, Tila! It's MTV's next reality star.

34 TOP 33 CHART

36 DEAR SUPERSTAR: CHRIS MARTIN

Coldplay's frontman reveals dark childhood secrets and a love of Limp Bizkit.

42 COLLECT CALL: MÖTLEY CRÜE

168 hours with the Sunset Strip legends

50 THE GREATEST SONGS EVER: "POP MUZIK"

One Brit's ambitious attempt to encapsulate 25 years of popular music in a three-minute song

52 STATION TO STATION

All hail the Hold Steady, the best '70s-rock-radio-meets-trash-punk band to drunkenly walk the Earth!

108 WHO DO G UNIT THINK THEY ARE?

Ringleader 50 Cent reveals his secret crush.

THE GUIDE

79 NEW RELEASES

Lil Wayne, Beck, the Hold Steady and more

92 REISSUES

David Bowie, Bo Diddley, Billy Joel and more

94 BACK CATALOGUE: FUNKADELIC

A complete guide to George Clinton and Co.'s sometimes brilliant, always weird, recorded output

96 MOVIES

Pineapple Express, The Rocker and more

98 GAMES

Hellboy: The Science of Evil and more



ON THE COVER:

JACK BLACK
PHOTOGRAPH BY GAVIN BOND.
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Grooming by Shawnelle Prestidge.

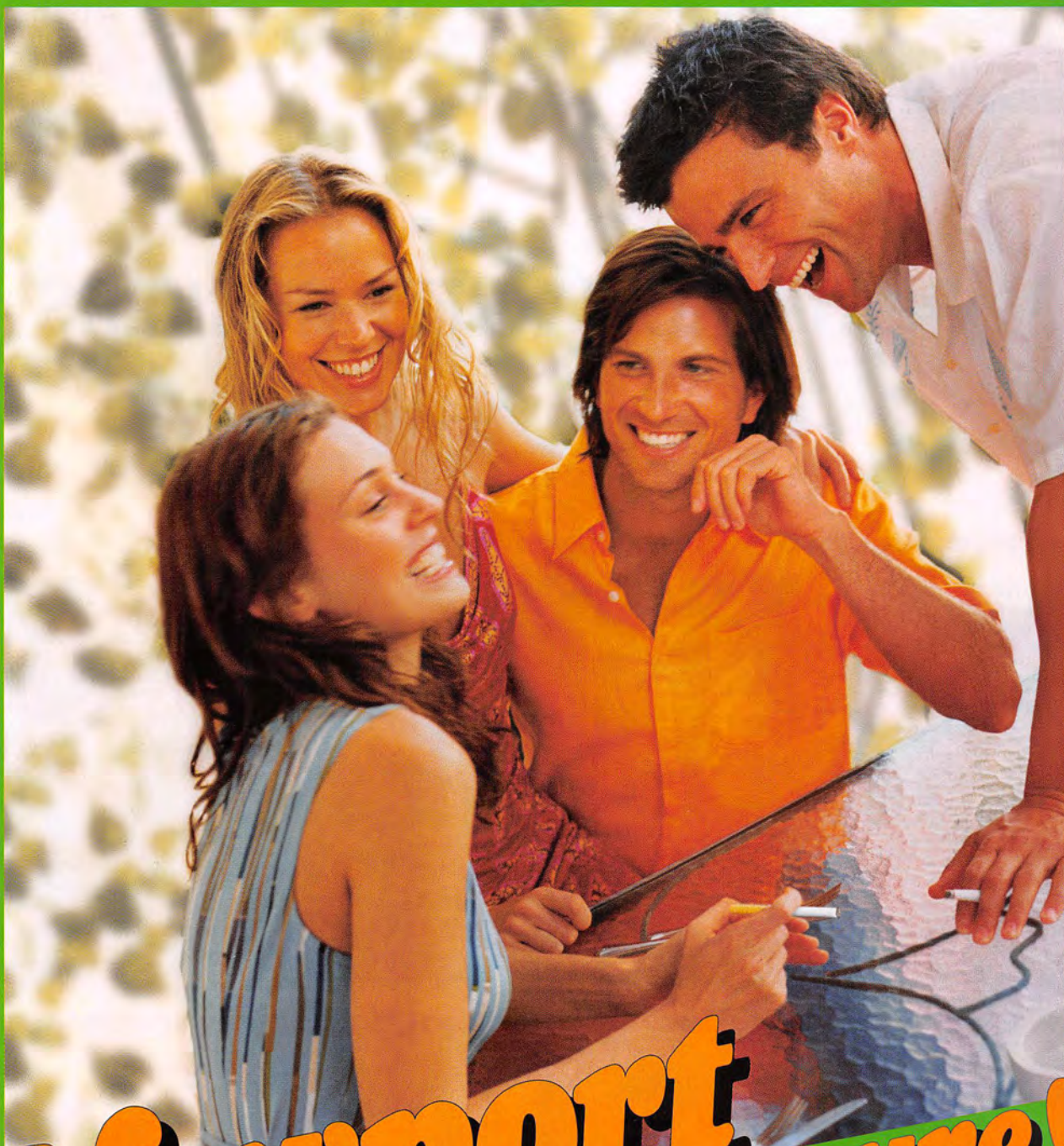
42



ARTIST INDEX

Where to find your favorite performers in this month's *Blender*

BANNER, DAVID (wants an albino platypus) 32, 80
BLACK KIDS 84
DAFT PUNK 97
DIDDLEY, BO 93
FUNKADELIC 94
G UNIT 86, 108
HOLD STEADY, THE 52, 86
M 50
MARTIN, CHRIS (strengths: oral sex, making oatmeal) 36
MONTAG, HEIDI 20
MÖTLEY CRÜE 42, 64
OBERST, CONOR 70
PERRY, KATY 26
SHWAYZE 30
T-PAIN (bustin' out the bearded ho's for his next tour) 28
VAMPIRE WEEKEND 24



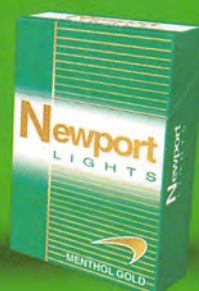
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Cue them up. TheStuffInside.com

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THE BLENDER

BIBLE

THE HOLY COMMANDMENTS
OF POP CULTURE



1 Keri Hilson "ENERGY"

ZONE 4/MOSELY/INTERSCOPE

Timbaland's "Way I Are" protégée belts out a massive heartbreak ballad about renewable resources ... or rocky romance.

2 ○ Black Kids

■ "Listen to Your Body Tonight"

Columbia

Synth-drunk new-wave brats command your hips to get a-humpin'.

3 ○ Pussycat Dolls

■ "When I Grow Up"

A&M

A bling-y cautionary tale, full of saucy stomps and struts, about keeping your head on straight and your midriff bare.

4 ○ G Unit

■ "Rider Pt. 2"

G Unit/Interscope

Man, 50 Cent can issue death threats while singing into a vocoder and still come off badass!

5 ○ Jaguar Love

■ "Highways of Gold"

Matador

They whip up a great, punky racket, and the singer sounds like the dude from Rush. 'Nuff said.

6 ○ Coldplay

■ "Lost!"

Capitol

Mr. Paltrow cautions against ego inflation over a giant church-organ melody.

7 ○ Busta Rhymes

■ feat. Reek Da Villian, Spliff Star, Lil Wayne, Nas, the Game and Big Daddy Kane
"Don't Touch Me" (Remix)

Flipmode/Aftermath/Interscope

So many guests, we don't have room to tell you how awesome they all are (especially Wayne).

8 ○ Weezer

■ "Heart Songs"

DGC/Interscope

An endearingly cheesy trip through singer Rivers Cuomo's high-school playlist.

9 ○ Judi Chicago

■ "Jack Your Box"

Solutionist/Aljira

Atlanta disco-scuZZ hooligans deliver the line of the year: "We're gonna get naked and watch Cops." We're so there, dudes!

10 ○ Ratatat

■ "Mirando"

XL

Brooklyn instrumental duo whips up some more fantastic cock-rock video-game music.

11 ○ The Rapture

■ "No Sex for Ben"

Rockstar Games

Timbaland based "SexyBack" on the Rapture's frenetic disco. Here he teams up with them for a song that sucks for Ben and rocks for us.

12 ○ Al Green

■ feat. Anthony Hamilton

"Lay It Down"

Blue Note

The greatest living soul singer teams with ?uestlove, proves his magnificence is still intact.

13 ○ Common feat.

■ Pharrell

"Universal Mind Control (U.M.C.)"

Geffen

Common raps like it's 1983, and Pharrell pays loving homage to Afrika Bambaataa-style electro.

14 ○ T.I.

■ "No Matter What"

Grand Hustle/Atlantic
A slow-brewing track as gangsta as you'd expect from a man under house arrest.

15 ○ Beck

■ "Chemtrails"

Interscope

It starts off woozy, rocks the hell out, then drifts off again—more glorious weirdness from Beck and Danger Mouse.

16 ○ Tilly and the Wall

■ "Pot Kettle Black"

Team Love

Righteous, stomping-blues-rock indignation from Omaha, Nebraska, indie weirdos.

17 ○ The Hold

■ Steady

■ "Sequestered in Memphis"

Vagrant

The best bar band in America returns with riffastic rock about Texas subpoenas and outlaw cat sitters. Bottoms up!

18 ○ Benji Hughes

■ "You Stood Me Up"

New West

Hilarious dating drama from a guy who falsettos like Prince and looks like an Appalachian drifter.

19 ○ Usher

■ "Trading Places"

LaFace/Zomba

Slow-throbbing evidence that even when he's role-playing the girl—doing housework, being on the bottom—Usher is 1,000 percent more man than the rest of us.

20 ○ Lil Wayne

■ feat. Jay-Z

"Mr. Carter"

Cash Money/Universal
Two Carters. Five minutes. A zillion bananas-ass rhymes.

GO HERE

BEIJING, CHINA

Taking in some Olympic action? Here are the rock & roll bar, thrift store and fish-ball purveyor you've got to check out!

- 1 BEST AREA FOR BOILED STUFF ON STICKS**
NANLUOGUXIANG
This tiny side street is a trendy grub epicenter. For a sense of how the locals really get it done, hit one of the *mala tang* ("really spicy soup") stands for meats, fish balls, veggies and tofu, boiled in chili-pepper broth and served on a stick at 13 cents apiece. "It's a Beijing standard,"

says Ayungar (his name means *lightning* in Mongolian), the guitarist for local punks the Linga. "Everyone loves it."

- 2 BEST CHEAPO BAR**
2 KOLEGAS
21 Liangmaqiao Lu
Tucked away in one of Beijing's back alleys—between a falafel stand and low-income housing—this music venue is packed nightly with everyone from Beijing's international art crowd to amused migrant workers to the tough-as-nails Manchurian dudes who own the place. Come for the avant-garde rock acts onstage, stay for the sprawling outdoor patio (the space adjoins a drive-in theater) and the dirt-cheap Tsingtao drafts.

- 3 BEST PLACE TO DANCE WITH A RUSSIAN HOOKER**
THE WORLD OF SUZIE WONG
1A Nongzhanguan Lu, 2nd floor, Chaoyang
This bar is named for a 1957 novel about a Hong Kong prostitute, and there's truth in the advertising: The place is full of bona fide pimps and their gussied-up employees, who compete for the attention of the garishly dressed expat clientele. The décor is updated '30s opium den: dark and plush with mirrored walls. For a glimpse of an East-meets-West collision at its most surreal, swing through on "hip-hop bling bling model night."

- 4 BEST PLACE TO DRESS LIKE A CHINESE GLAMPUNK SCENESTER**
UNDERGROUND KIDZ
Gulou Dong Dajie #69-2, Dongcheng
The finest of Beijing's vintage-clothing stores, Underground Kidz's racks balance secondhand gear—perfectly worn Levi's and Doc Martens—with wilder finds, like paisley pea coats and fur-collared suede jackets.
CONSTANTINE COMENOS



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& PLAY
THESE

GAME
Samba de Amigo
Sega; Wii
Find *Guitar Hero* too serious? Then how about a party game in which you're a sombrero-wearing, rhythm-smitten monkey? To play, shake the Wii remotes like maracas in time to Latin-flavored hits.

YOUTUBE
"Love in This Club" (Chuck E. Cheese remix)
Usher's hit celebrates V.I.P.-area sex. But what about children's-birthday-party-emporium sex? Here, animatronic Chuck E. Cheese puppets lip-sync the track to hilarious—and mildly disturbing—effect. Search: "Love in this club" + "Thrash"

DVD
Joe Strummer: The Future Is Unwritten
Bono, Matt Dillon and Johnny Depp expound on the Clash frontman's greatness in this warm tribute.



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Music's 25 Most Dastardly Villains
Transcendental gurus! Maniac bikers! The man! Suge Knight (left)! And the 21 other most evil forces rock & roll has ever seen!

Exclusive! Katy Perry Video Interview
The spunky songstress behind "Ur So Gay" dishes about metrosexual celebrities and woman-smooching in this rowdy, no-holds-barred chat.

Jack Black
Check out exclusive video footage from this month's cover shoot and enter a contest for a chance to win a guitar signed (and smashed) by His Blackness.



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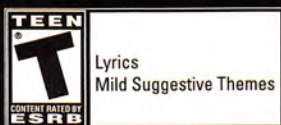
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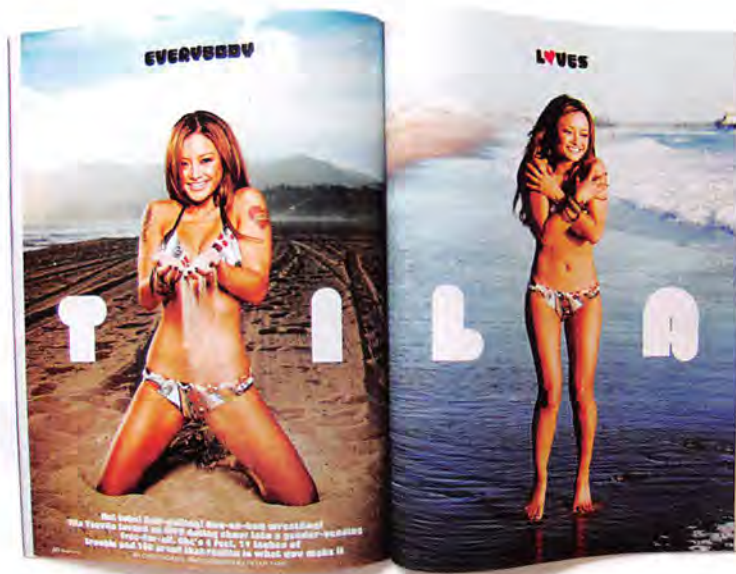


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YOU'VE GOT MAIL

BECAUSE SHARING IS CARING

"Everybody Loves Tila" was the title of our June cover story on MTV-dating-show dynamo Tila Tequila. But we quickly learned that not *everybody* loves Tila, particularly the reader who sent us a venom-filled e-mail describing the model-musician-MySpace sensation as "the whore of Babylon, legs spread wide, filling the world with her toxic disease." *Ouch!* We got some nice, non-Pentacostal letters about the bisexual reality star too.



THE LOVE THAT DARE SPEAK ITS NAME

Your article on Tila Tequila was a breath of fresh air! It's nice to see someone challenging the status quo and being exactly who they want to be. Tila has opened the door for all Americans to be comfortable with their sexuality.

Breana Ragland, Milwaukee

PISSY!

Imagine my surprise when, upon receiving the *Blender* with Tila Tequila on the cover, my cat immediately squatted on Tila's face and peed. After reading the article, I realized I should have joined her.

Anna Hull, Minneapolis

Thank God we recently switched to extra-absorbent covers!

THE SCARLETT LETTER

Your June issue features Tila Tequila on the cover and gives Scarlett Johansson's genius new album a grand diss. My, what a class act you are, *Blender*!

Woody Woodham, Prescott, AZ

First off, we gave Scarlett's album a three-star (good) rating. Second, just what is it with ScarJo and guys named Woody?

¡MÁS TEQUILA, POR FAVOR!

As a longtime fan of Tila Tequila, let me say, thanks, *Blender*, for your feature on her! The pictures are great—she's hot and looks like she's enjoying every moment of her life. But I didn't like the part where Dr. Drew Pinsky categorized reality-show contestants. I hate when therapists like

him pass judgment on people they don't even know!

Reynard Pablo, Los Angeles

SOUTHERN DISCOMFORT

Thanks for giving Nashville some love in June's Bible. Even more thanks for citing the Muse as the best underground rock club. But next time, how about you talk to an artist who's actually played the Muse? Paramore's Hayley Williams hasn't, and she's from Franklin, not Nashville, for God's sake. Also, the club's couches: not that comfy.

Brittney W., Smyrna, TN

WORD WAR

Primordial. Imperiousness. Deft. Wrought. Amassing. Revivalists. These are some of the words critic Jon Dolan uses in his

IF POP STARS WERE DOGS ...



JANIS JOPLIN
THE POP STAR



PEARL
THE DOG

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ARMY STRONG.®

"review" of the Sword's *Gods of the Earth* (New Releases, May). Who is he writing for, and what does any of this have to do with the quality of the record or the musicianship on it? I don't have an MFA in English—who gives a rat's ass how expansive his vocabulary is? Mike Harbut, Brooklyn, NY

Your supercilious missive, um ... sucks.

MOLDY PROPHETS

You missed an example in your June Ask Blender answer on bands that seemed to have predicted 9/11. The Moldy Peaches' self-titled debut was released on September 11, 2001, and featured the song "NYC's Like a Graveyard" (about the city's rock scene), which contains the eerie line: "All the tombstones skyscraping."

Leif Knutson, Brooklyn Park, MN

CATTY!

At the top of your May 2008 cover, it reads, COUGAR ALERT: MADONNA & MARIAH ON THE PROWL. It's my understanding that *cougar* is a term for an older, attractive, single woman—the operative word being *attractive*. Mariah still looks good, but Madonna has gone to hell. To call Madonna a cougar is a slap in the face to older attractive women everywhere! I would appreciate it if your staff would be more responsible in the future.

Steve Samasuck, New York

MMM ... BACON

In May's Burner article on actors turned musicians ("S.A.G. Songs"), you claim that there are five degrees of separation between Terrence Howard and Kevin Bacon. Wrong! Terrence Howard was in *Crash* with Matt Dillon, and Dillon was in *Wild Things* with Kevin Bacon. That's two degrees.

Stan Klejko, Rockford, IL

TOKIO TIME

Thanks for your feature on Tokio Hotel ("\$848 With Tokio Hotel," May). The humor of the boys really showed through. Also, for your information, I am not a 14-year-old girl—double that and you get closer to my age. Tokio Hotel have fans of all ages and of both sexes.

Monica Anderson-Lee, London

INDECISION '08

When are you going to put out a political issue? *Blender* helps me make most of my life decisions. I'll need your help deciding whom to vote for in the upcoming election.

Rebecca Hutcherson, Chandler, AZ

Sorry, but we're waiting to see which candidate can guarantee us a cushy post on the federal Marine Mammal Commission before we offer a formal endorsement.

CORRECTION

Due to an editing error, a review of My Morning Jacket's *Evil Urges* in the July *Blender* described singer Jim James as "awful." The sentence should have read, "But James is awful antsy for a jam-rock, and he's spent the band's last two albums relentlessly tinkering with the MMJ DNA." Our apologies to Jim James, who, we'd like to emphasize, really is *not* awful.

SUPERFAN

BRINGING OUT THE STALKER IN YOU SINCE 2001



JOHN MAYER AND KAZUO SEMITSU



IGGY POP AND PAULA MESSNER



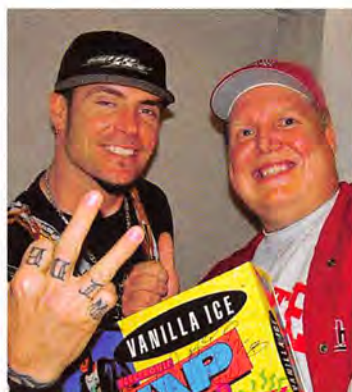
KARIM DIANE AND STEVIE WONDER



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SMILE!

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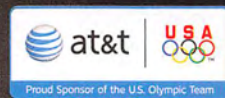
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BURNER

ROCK-STAR OLYMPICS

On the eve of the XXIX games in Beijing, Fergie, Lily Allen and Mariah Carey debut their own routines. Bona fide Olympians and *Blender* rate their skills **By Jon Coplon**



EVENT
Gymnastics
ATHLETE
Fergie
VENUE
The Today show, New York, May 20

Paul Hamm
2004 Olympic gold medalist (all-around gymnastics)



9.9

"That's a great one-handed front walkover. It looks like she has some training. Good form: her legs were straight, and she didn't stumble out of it. And she was singing, I give her props for that."

Bruce Jenner
1976 Olympic gold medalist (decathlon)



7.0

"I thought her flips were more impressive than her crawling around the stage. Extra points for shaking her butt. Her song is a little bit screechy, though. If she were on *American Idol*, she might get voted off."

Blender



8.5

She clearly shares our admiration of flexible schoolgirls rigorously trained behind the Iron Curtain in the '80s. And talk about skills: She's singing Heart's "Barracuda" upside down.



EVENT
Diving
ATHLETE
Lily Allen
VENUE
Cap d'Antibes, France, May 14

Troy Dumais
Two-time Olympian (diving)



5.0

"She's doing a kung fu karate-kick move in the air for beauty points. You never want to enter the water with your legs apart—there's going to be water where the sun don't shine. That's going to leave a mark."

Bruce Jenner
1976 Olympic gold medalist (decathlon)



4.0

"My first suggestion: a one-piece from the '30s; they cover everything. Next suggestion: a wet suit. Very weak on form—it looks like she's going to dive but then goes legs first. I give her high marks for guts, though."

Blender



5.1

Leaping Lily is keeping it old-school—she's competing topless, the way the ancient Greeks did! Massive points for that. But there's nothing pretty about this belly flop. That's going to cost her, Bob.



EVENT
Baseball
ATHLETE
Mariah Carey
VENUE
The first pitch at the Tokyo Dome, Japan, May 28

Cat Osterman
2004 Olympic gold medalist (softball)



1.0

"I don't know if she understands the correct dress code. You have to let it fly and not flick it like a girl. I'm pretty sure the high heels and three-inch manicured nails got in the way. Her music is great, though."

Bruce Jenner
1976 Olympic gold medalist (decathlon)



3.0

"The shoes don't work. A pair of Adidas would help. She'd be better off if she could throw with her vocal chords. I give her an 8 on her legs, though. Cute outfit too; I like her hoop earrings. She looked good."

Blender



2.2

Where's this Cannon on her arm we've heard so much about? Didn't she take away anything from dating Derek Jeter? Appropriately, Mariah's figure is approaching anime proportions.



THE GOLD MEDAL GOES TO ...

BRONZE
MARIAH
CAREY
AVERAGE
SCORE:
2.1



GOLD
FERGIE
AVERAGE
SCORE:
8.5



SILVER
LILY
ALLEN
AVERAGE
SCORE:
4.7



"Upside down/Boy, you turn me." 19

WHEN WILL
YOUR FAVORITE POP
STAR CROAK?HEIDI
MONTAG

Birth date:
September 15, 1986
Current age: 21



Projected death
year: 2052



Gerontologist Dr.
David J. Demko:
"Heidi needs to
stay out of the
sun to save face
and read *How
to Win Friends and
Influence People*."

ESTIMATED
LIFE
EXPECTANCY

65

Loneliness:
Has alienated
most friends
(-1), fans
(-1) and Lauren
Conrad (-1)

Plastic
fantastic:
Added to
breasts and
lips, took away
from nose

Artist cred:
Aforementioned
(porno-esque)
video widely
panned

Skin-cancer
threat: Fair-
skinned blonde
who frolicked
in sun for
"Higher" video

Education:
Fashion Institute
of Design and
Merchandising
dropout

Stress:
Scheduling
"surprise"
candid shots
with paparazzi

Trauma:
War-hero
stepbrother
Eric O'Hara fell
off a building
and died

Love life:
Engaged to *Hills*
co-villain Spencer
Pratt, who wants
to adopt an African
baby and name
him Dunk

Peoples:
Close-knit
family (+3) from
a small town in
Colorado (+2)

Lifestyle:
Drinks/smokes
moderately,
breathes L.A.
smog

DEATH-AGE
CALCULATOR
STARTS AT
AGE

79

NEWS
ROUNDUP

About 200
**My Chemical
Romance** fans,
some with black-
and-bleached
hair and band-
leader jackets,
unleashed their
emo angst on
the *Daily Mail* at
a protest in
central London.
The tabloid
had dubbed the
group a "suicide
cult band" when
a 13-year-old
girl took her own
life weeks after
becoming a rabid
fan. One sign
read, WE'RE NOT
A CULT! WE'RE
THE MCRMY!

James Brown's
leather belt
with a red-and-
silver rhinestone
SEX MACHINE
buckle was
expected to fetch
nearly \$3,000
at a Christie's
auction of 320
funky items that
belonged to the
late Godfather
of Soul. More
affordable:
rollers, picks
and a dome hair
dryer from the
salon in his South
Carolina home.

SECRET SHOW-OFF!

PRINCE'S HOUSEQUAKE

On May 31, his Purpleness hosted a party for his new book,
21 Nights, at his velvet-draped L.A. palace. Let's relive it ...



WAY IN A friend of an associate
of Prince's assistant smooth-
talked the security guard at the
gates of his Beverly Park hood

CROWD Around 350 fans, including
Diddy, Dr. Phil, Sylvester Stallone,
Olivia Newton-John, John Legend,
Eddie Murphy and guests from
Charlie Sheen's wedding next door

SET LIST Covers of "With a Little
Help From My Friends," "Crimson
& Clover" and "Wild Thing" (into
his own "The One U Wanna C").
Plus "Cream," "U Got the
Look" and "Shhh." He ended
with "Purple Rain" and "1999."

OVERHEARD "Dude ... is that Prince
playing?"—guy at bar

SURREAL MOMENT "We have to
go after this song. We've kept the
neighbors up long enough. Wait!
Don't you all have to go to work
tomorrow?"—Prince, 2:45 A.M.

HOW YOU KNOW IT WAS A HOT SHOW
Dr. Phil was there! Sean Evans

Send your secret-show pics to
secrets@blender.com

BLENDER'S BURNING
QUESTION

What is David Archuleta
doing RIGHT NOW?



Reader Wisdom
"Filling out a
membership
application
for the Soul
Patrol."
Lou Hiltin,
Pensacola, FL

WIN ME!



Log on to Blender.com
for the next Burning
Question. One reader
will have his/her brilliant
comment published
in the magazine
and win the **Flip Mino**
mini camcorder.



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PLAY FOR TEAM USA WITH EXCLUSIVE DOWNLOADS

Didn't qualify for the Olympic Games this year? Couldn't swing the plane ticket to Beijing? Don't sweat it—you can still rock out like a gold medalist with a special soundtrack recorded by hot artists like **Josh Kelley**, brought to you by AT&T. The proceeds from each download go to Team USA, so you can feel like you're part of the action—even if the only sport you do involves adjusting the easy chair.

Questions for Josh Kelley

What's your favorite Olympic event? If I were an Olympian, I would destroy everyone at ping-pong.

If you could meet any Olympic athlete past or present, who would it be and why? [Sprinter] Michael Johnson and the gold shoes. The 1996 Olympic Games were right down the street from where I'm from in Atlanta. That year, he won the 200 meters, the 400 meters, and our hearts.

A lot of athletes listen to music before they compete. How do you get pumped up before performing? I like to throw on my iPod and get in the zone. Sometimes I just sit backstage, have a beer, and hang with my band. My show is pretty off the cuff and my band is killer, so we don't have to focus too much. We just get psyched to be in front of the fans.

What inspired your song for the soundtrack? I've grown up watching the Olympics and have always admired all the athletes as they are chasing their goals. This song is a tribute to everyone who has worked hard for their passion in life. People go through ups and downs on their path in life, but this song is about never giving up on your dream.

If you could add any event to the summer Olympics—sporting or non-sporting—what would it be? I would add golf. I'm a big golfer and I would love to see it as an Olympic sport!



➔ To check out "To Remember" by Josh Kelley and other great tracks, go to att.net/TeamUSA during the Beijing Olympic Games.



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NATURE

ROCK-STAR ANIMALS

Paleontology's music hall of fame

A spider discovered in Alabama has been named after Neil Young, joining a menagerie of rocking mollusks, crustaceans and creepy crawlers.



Sting
Hyla stingi
Tree frog
Colombia



Elvis Presley
Preseucoila imallshookupis
Gall wasp
Throughout U.S.



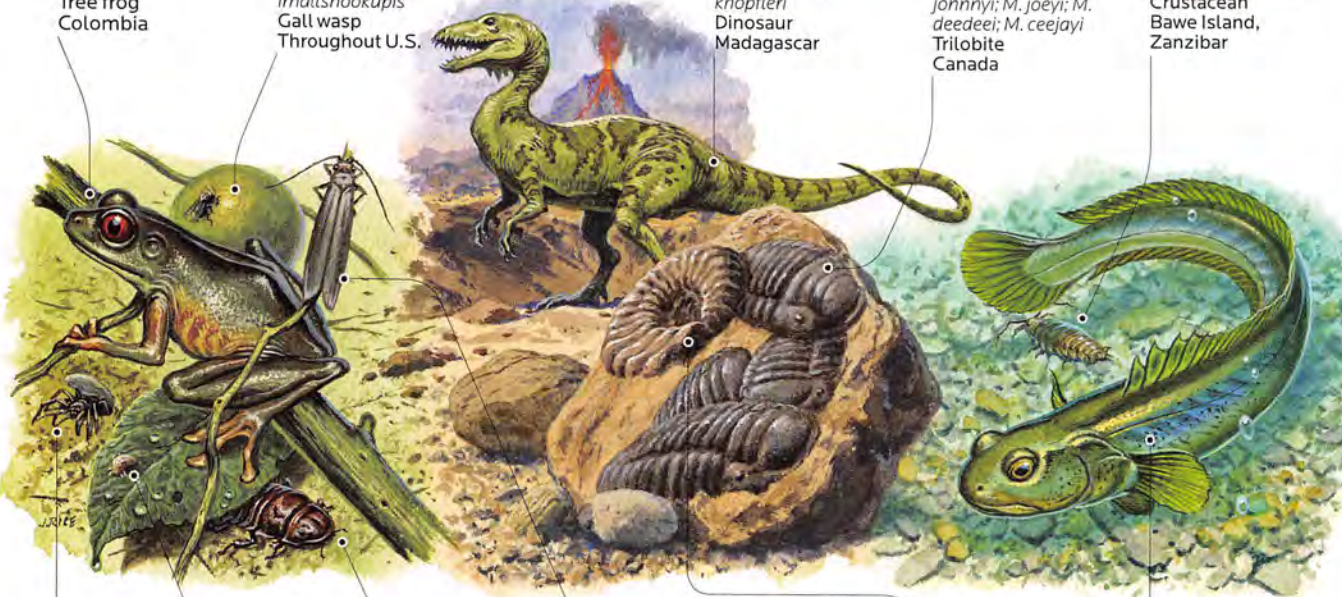
Mark Knopfler
Masiakasaurus knopfleri
Dinosaur
Madagascar



Ramones
Mackenziurus johnnyi; *M. joeyi*; *M. deedei*; *M. cejayi*
Trilobite
Canada



Freddie Mercury
Cirolana mercuryi
Crustacean
Bawe Island, Zanzibar



Neil Young
Myrmekiaphilia neilyoungi
Trapdoor spider
Southern U.S.



James Brown
Funkotriplogynium lagobarius
Mite
Australia



Jerry Garcia
Cryptocercus garciai
Cockroach
Eastern U.S.



Petula Clark
Petula (genus)
Tineid moth
Russia



Mick Jagger
Anomphalus jaggerius
Fossilized mollusk
Western U.S.



Frank Zappa
Zappa confluentus
Goby fish
Papua New Guinea
Research by Kate Thuma

Set phasers for ... sizzle.



WEIRD BAND ALERT

WARP 11

Sacramento Trekkies go where no band has gone before

Sex, drugs and ... *Star Trek*?

Affirmative. "Those are the things we love," says vocalist-bassist Captain Karl Miller, 39. The hard-rock quartet combines pervy, *Star Trek*-themed lyrics and risqué Starfleet outfits on songs like "Suck My Spock" and "Belt Buckle Tractor Beam."

A hit at conventions, right?

Yes, but it doesn't stop there. "We've also played bars and

corporate functions," Miller says.

Offstage antics involve green women in hot tubs and orgies in shuttle-craft-shaped RVs.

"Just expect debauchery at our shows," he adds.

Degeekery, you mean?

That's a fair question, considering.

"Most Trekkies are repressed,"

Miller admits. "But we started this band to get laid."

Darren Ratner



WORD!

"I think that's something a woman should do when marrying a man. I think it's a great tradition."

Ashlee Simpson-Wentz, on her new last name



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PLAY FOR TEAM USA WITH EXCLUSIVE DOWNLOADS

Didn't qualify for the Olympic Games this year? Couldn't swing the plane ticket to Beijing? Don't sweat it—you can still rock out like a gold medalist with a special soundtrack recorded by hot artists like Colbie Caillat, brought to you by AT&T. The proceeds from each download go to Team USA, so you can feel like you're part of the action—even if the only sport you do involves programming the DVR.

Questions for Colbie Caillat

What's your favorite Olympic event? I love all the aquatic sports.

Is there an Olympic moment that's particularly memorable for you? I remember running to the TV to watch the swimmers race—I was a swimmer and love the freestyle stroke. I would learn and get inspired from watching the athletes. Competing in the Olympic Games was one of my dreams when I was younger.

If you could meet any Olympic athlete past or present, who would it be and why? [Swimmer] Michael Phelps. I think he is amazingly talented and a very handsome young man!

A lot of athletes listen to music before they compete. How do you get pumped up before performing? Before I perform I listen to Bob Marley, Lauryn Hill, and Amy Winehouse because their music relaxes me and warms my voice up with their amazing vocals.

What inspired your song for the soundtrack? I wrote "Somethin' Special" about the process of growing up and becoming everything you've always wanted to be. As kids we all have dreams and sometimes as we get older, things happen in life that somehow delay our dreams. So this song is to remind people to try as hard as you can to follow your dreams, because you will never know if you never try.

If you could add any event to the summer Olympics—sporting or non-sporting—what would it be? I would like to see open-water sports like surfing, kite surfing, and windsurfing in the Olympic Games. Those are worldwide sports that are not recognized enough!



➔ To check out "Somethin' Special" by Colbie Caillat and other great tracks, go to att.net/TeamUSA during the Beijing Olympic Games.



Did Elvira really lose her virginity to Tom Jones?

Don Sparks, Broken Arrow, OK

Weirdly, yes. Before she donned the campy mantle of Elvira, Mistress of the Dark, the former Cassandra Peterson was one of rock & roll's first groupies. A cute redhead from Colorado Springs, Colorado, Peterson canoodled with Jimi Hendrix, Jimmy Page and Elvis but always refused to go all the way. After high school she moved to Las Vegas and got a job in a nude revue called *Viva Les Girls*—where, one fateful night in 1969, she met the tight-pantsed Jones.

"I was fresh meat," Peterson recalled last year. "Tom seemed gentlemanly and nice, so when he was jumping on me a few hours later, I thought, *Well, if I'm ever gonna do this, it might as well be with Tom Jones.*" But the well-endowed Welshman wasn't very gentle with her what's-new-pussycat. "It was painful and horrible," Peterson said. Truly horrible—Jones had done some damage to her lady parts. She had to go to the ER alone to get a couple of stitches.

"I thought for sure we were gonna run away together and get married. I went backstage to see him the next night, but he was with his two background singers ... and was all over them. I was devastated."



I heard Vampire Weekend got their name from a movie, but I can't find it anywhere on IMDB. What gives?

Rick Schevling, Alpharetta, GA

The summer after his freshman year at Columbia University, future VW frontman Ezra Koenig filmed a super-low-budget horror flick, *Vampire Weekend*. "It was about a guy, that I played, called Walcott, whose dad gets killed by vampires because vampires take over his country," Koenig said.

He set the footage aside and promptly forgot about it. When he found it a couple of years later, he decided the title would make for a good band name. The movie was never finished, but Koenig did edit it into a trailer. Search YouTube for "vampire weekend trailer" to check it out.

Other Netflix-iTunes crossovers!



I just saw Pete Wentz's wedding photos. How does he get his hair to look like that?

Brodie Hanks, Pensacola, FL



STEP
01



"You start with a basic, short men's cut on the back and sides," says Shaun Cottle, head stylist at New York indie-rock hair salon Seagull. "Just use scissors and make it about an inch, inch and a half."

STEP
02



"Starting at the top of the crown, you want to graduate to longer, choppy layers. Get yourself clippers with a guard and then slice little pieces off at a diagonal."

STEP
03



Now comes the hot stuff. "Use a flat iron," Cottle says. "Iron the top part forward and the front part down, so you have bangs. That's what gives it that real '80s-skater-punk look."

STEP
04



Finally, dirty it up. "Use a relatively heavy pomade," Cottle says. "I recommend Davines No. 10 Universal Polishing Coat. It'll give it that greasy, unwashed look. Or you can just not bathe for five days."

Lather,
Wentz,
Repeat

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Questions for Army of Me

What's your favorite Olympic event?

VINCE SCHEUERMAN, VOCALIST: I particularly like the aquatic sports.

DAVE CULLEN, BASSIST: Women's volleyball. I like their uniforms.

DENNIS MANUEL, DRUMMER: Cycling because I've always liked ten-speeds, and it's faster than running.

What's memorable about the Olympic Games for you?

SCHEUERMAN: I like the drama—seeing people compete, try to better their scores, watch it all unfold. **CULLEN:** USA men's basketball, back when Larry Bird and Michael Jordan played.

MANUEL: I like the peaceful, competitive nature of the games. It'd be so much better if everyone was diving off diving boards than aiming guns at one another. **BRAD TURSI, GUITARIST:** [Sprinter] Michael Johnson winning gold.

A lot of athletes listen to music before they compete. How do you get pumped up before performing? **SCHEUERMAN:** Listening to music helps get us going before a show. Also, it's a great feeling to arrive at a venue, see your name on the posters and the marquee, and the line of kids around the block waiting to see you perform.

What inspired your song for the soundtrack? **SCHEUERMAN:** The song, "Perfect," might just be my and Brad's favorite song from our record, *Citizen*. To me it kind of embodies us as a rock band, sonically and thematically.

If you could add any event to the summer Olympics—sporting or non-sporting—what would it be? **SCHEUERMAN:** Definitely fly-fishing.



➔ To check out "Perfect" (Acoustic) by Army of Me and other great tracks, go to att.net/TeamUSA during the Beijing Olympic Games.



Proud Sponsor of the U.S. Olympic Team.

HOW TO DATE FOUR GUYS AT ONCE

She kissed a girl, now breakout singer **Katy Perry** offers advice on man-juggling • Photograph by Bryan Sheffield

1. HAVE A BOY IN EVERY PORT

"As a sophisticated woman, you should have business in both Los Angeles and New York, and summer in Paris. You can't just take an L.A. guy to Paris and expect him to know what the 6th arrondissement is. He would just take you directly to the Eiffel Tower with the rest of the tourists."

2. STICK TO A TIGHT SCHEDULE

"Guys like to surprise you. Girls don't like surprises. Which is why a precise calendar is important if you're going to be an international player. You'll need it color-coded. If you do get surprised, just let the other one out the back door. Always have a back door. And a laundry chute!"

3. KEEP YOUR PICS RATED P.G.

"Be particular about how you pose for photos, because the suggestive ones end up being tagged on Facebook. Trouble! We live in a world where you wake up and your whole diary from last night is on the Internet. You don't even have to be a celebrity. You are your own paparazzi!"

4. DO NOT GIVE HIM A DRESSER DRAWER

"They can never leave their stuff! I was bringing back the things an old boyfriend left at my house, and I accidentally returned something that wasn't his. He saw it, and he's like, 'This isn't mine!' And it's like, 'Well, it certainly could have been. I mean, you all wear Fruit of the fucking Loom!'"



OUT NOW
One of the Boys
(CAPITOL)

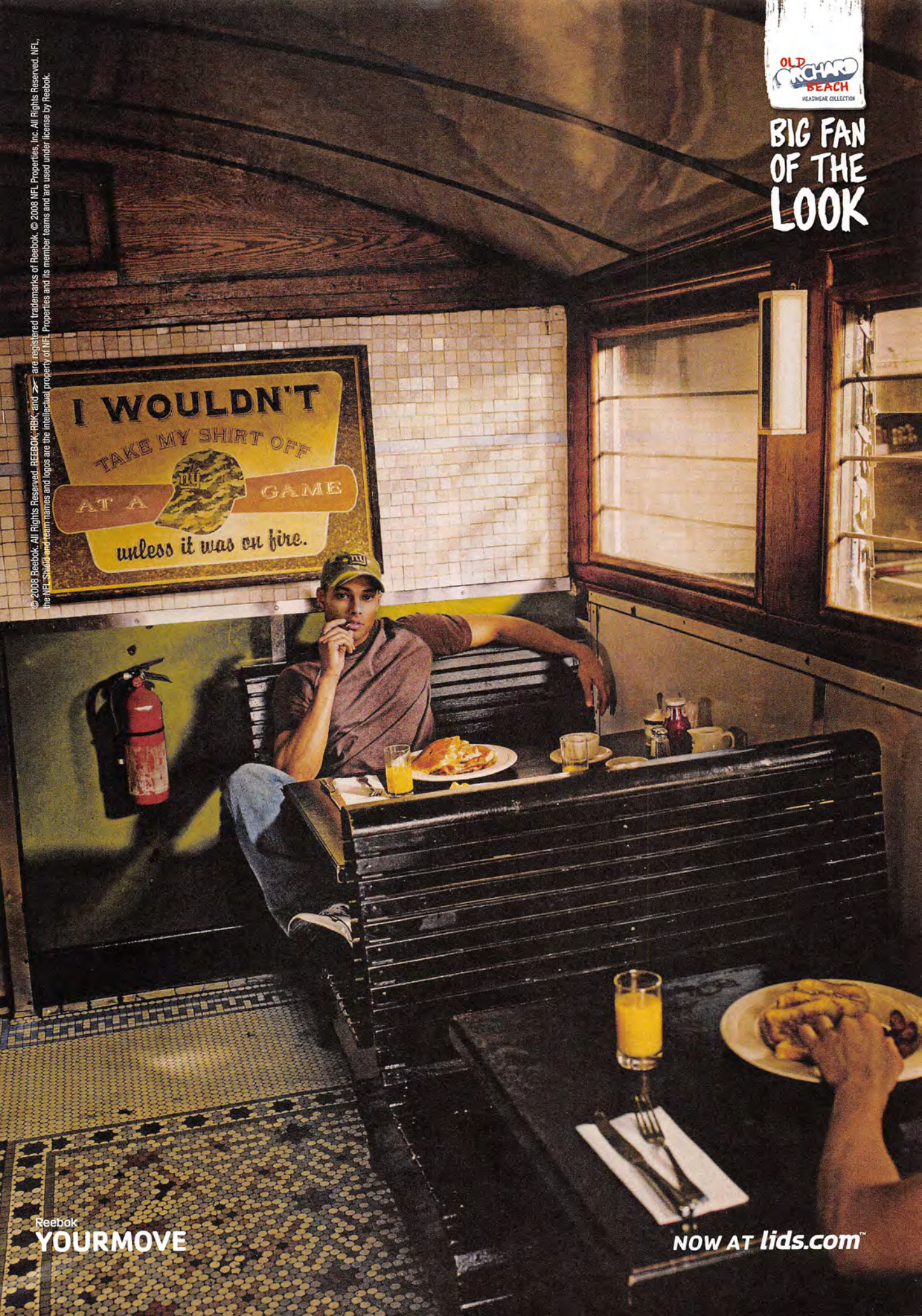


HAIR: CORI BARDO FOR SEBASTIAN PROFESSIONAL/CELESTINE KENNY/MAKEUP: KATHY ZEUNG FOR MAGNET L.A.

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LOOK



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IN THE STUDIO

"I'M GETTING ELEPHANTS!"

Horny android T-Pain wrangles Carrie Underwood—and bearded ho's—for his new, "circus-themed" album

T-Pain marries his two loves: Checkers and Slash's top hat.



Over the past few years, Faheem Najm, better known to rump shakers around the world as T-Pain, has helped everyone from Kanye West to Flo Rida to Chris Brown to R. Kelly mint mega hits—with his ululating Auto-Tune effects and ear-ringing hooks. But for album No. 3, he's cashing in his chips. "I got a lot of people that owe me favors," he says, calling *Blender* from a Miami studio. So far, Lil Wayne guests on "Can't Believe It," a Casanova track about "trying to get a girl to ride with you." Other scheduled cameos include West, Cee-Lo, André 3000 and ... Carrie Underwood? "I love 'Before He Cheats,'" T-Pain says. "It's like a song I would've written." (The country enthusiast put feelers out to Toby Keith as well, but had little luck.)

If Underwood isn't unexpected enough, there's one more genre-bending curveball in the works, an alt-rock jam called "That's Not Cool," which T-Pain describes as "a mixture of Linkin Park and Third Eye Blind." The rest of the album, though, which the 22-year-old Tallahassee, Florida, native is recording in Miami, Atlanta and Los Angeles, will follow the singer's proven future-funk formula: The bulk of the 38 songs he's cut so far feature characteristic ass-bobbling bass and not-so-subtle crunkuendo.

ALL ABOUT MY ALBUM

PRODUCER
T-Pain
STUDIO Circle House Studios, Miami
LAST ALBUM
Epiphany
THIS ALBUM
THR33 Ringz, out this fall

The whole thing is gathered under a rowdy circus concept—there are big-top animals in the artwork ("I'm getting elephants!"), and three of the songs are carnival-themed. And though he's still coming up with songs, he's already planning the tour. "You might see some sword-swallowers and midgets," T-Pain explains. "And bearded ho's." *Ryan Dombal*



ALSO IN THE STUDIO

> **YEAH YEAH YEAHS** escaped from New York to a barn in the Northeast and a ranch in Texas to find inspiration for the first new songs since 2007's *Is Is* EP. > **BEASTIE BOYS** tucked into an "undisclosed location," presumably their Oscilloscope Laboratories in New York, to lay down their first album since the Grammy-winning instrumental *The Mix-Up*, due in 2009. > **PETER BJORN AND JOHN** are finishing their own instrumental album for the fall and recording a vocals-and-all follow-up to 2007's *Writer's Block* for next year.

POP-STAR MUST-HAVE

STUFFED ANIMALS

Plush pals make any rocker squeezably soft

Alice Cooper

Jessica Simpson

Paris Hilton

Lenny Kravitz

Jonas Brothers

Kimberley Stewart



WORD!

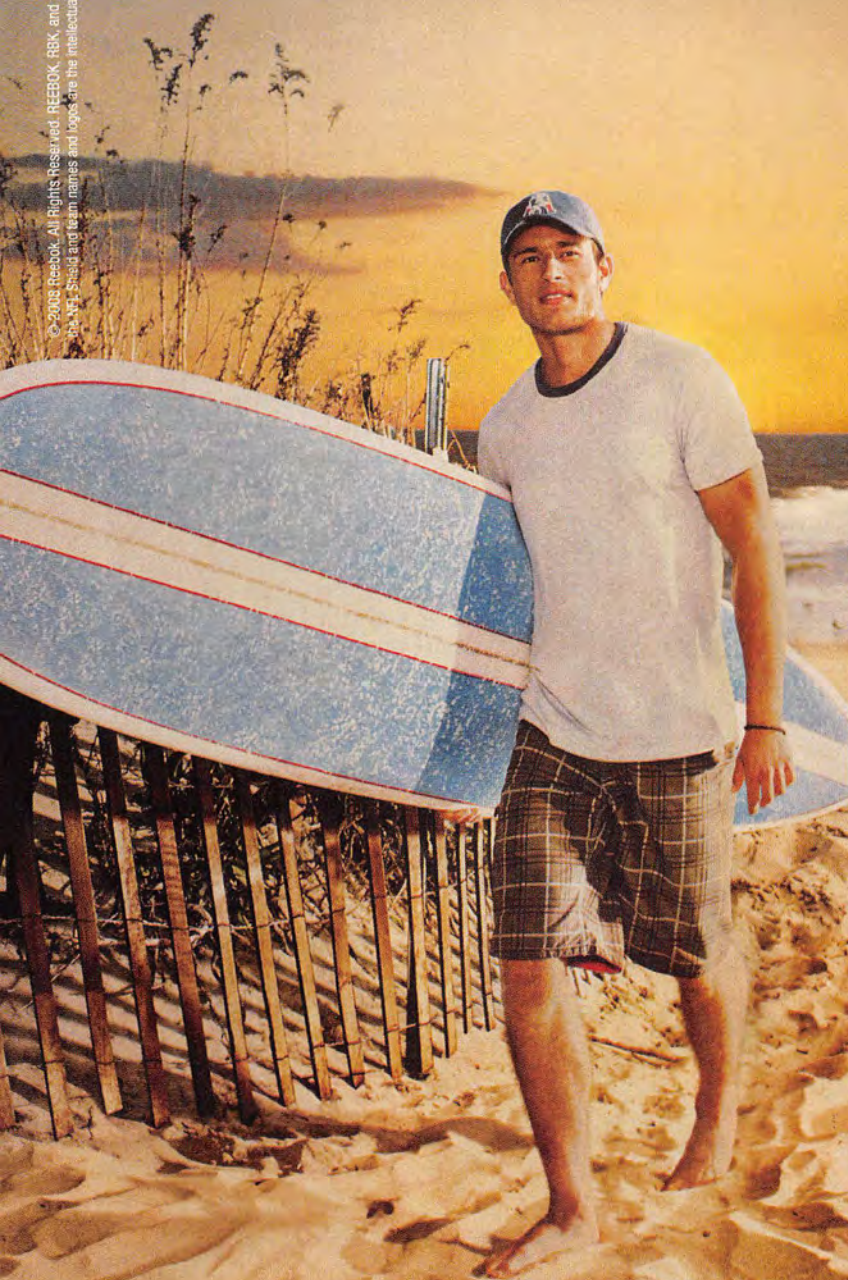
"I got a shovel and was going to kill one of the cats."

Pete Doherty, on hitting his rock bottom

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OF THE
LOOK



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ALL ABOUT ME!

WORST JOB I EVER HAD

"Starbucks! I don't like coffee, and I always messed up the high-maintenance-Malibu-moms' drinks."

WHAT I CAN'T TOUR WITHOUT

"This summer's Warped Tour will be my first time on the road, but I'll definitely need my cell-phone charger and my multivitamins."

MOST VALUABLE KITCHEN IMPLEMENT

"Juicer. Love juicing—it's vital. Jack LaLanne is my hero."



OUT NOW

Shwayze
(SURETONE/GEFFEN)

Pimp my weird Jeep-cart thing: Shwayze and producer Adler.

SHWAYZE

Straight outta Malibu, a laid-back rapper reports from last night's party By Mikael Wood
Photograph by Rony Alwin



His MTV reality series, *Buzzin'*, doesn't air until late July, but Shwayze insists he's already made his mark on TV. "They based Token from *South Park* on me," the 23-year-old MC says, recalling his experience growing up in Malibu, California, the overwhelmingly white beachside community. "I was everyone's one black friend!"

Born Aaron Smith, Shwayze spent his teens in rock bands but always nursed dreams of rapping. In 2005, he grabbed the mic at a gig by Whitestarr, the goofy sleaze-rock outfit fronted by Cisco Adler, better known for his dad (music-biz gad-about Lou Adler) and his girlfriends (Mischa Barton, Kimberly Stewart). Impressed by Shwayze's freestyle, Adler hired the rapper to run errands from his home studio and began producing breezy, guitar-flecked instrumentals for him. "I basically interned for beats," Shwayze explains, sitting in Adler's sprawling hilltop mansion.

"He climbed the corporate stepladder," Adler deadpans. "It's short, but the top is dope."

In true beach-bum fashion, they recorded Shwayze's debut while killing time before the clubs opened. The album details the trials and tribulations of a West Coast playboy: "Walking through Malibu, not a thing to do/Gotta find a fine young little girl to screw over," Shwayze raps on "Lazy Days." Adler says his protégé's charm sells itself, and so far, he's right: Even before the start of Shwayze's MTV show—which documents the creation of the album—his mellow folk-rap single "Buzzin'" is climbing playlists. "When the girls start spreading it through the social networks," Adler says, referring to Shwayze's million-plus MySpace plays, "you don't even have to talk it up." [BLENDER]



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LIFE AFTER ROCK

PHIL VARONE

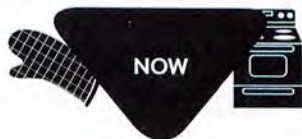
The Saigon Kick and Skid Row drummer turned 40 and traded groupies and blow for a wife and a cooking show

"IN 1988, four of us formed Saigon Kick, which was my first real band. We got signed and had a hit with 'Love Is on the Way.' It did well, but it put us into that 'acoustic ballad rock' category, which hurt us because we got shuffled aside once grunge happened.

At 23, touring blew me away. I'd jam with Cheap Trick, then end up running out of a girl's place when her husband came home. After Saigon Kick imploded in 1996, I joined Skid Row, which put me into a whole new level of rock stardom, with more cool tours, more drugs and more chicks to have sex with.

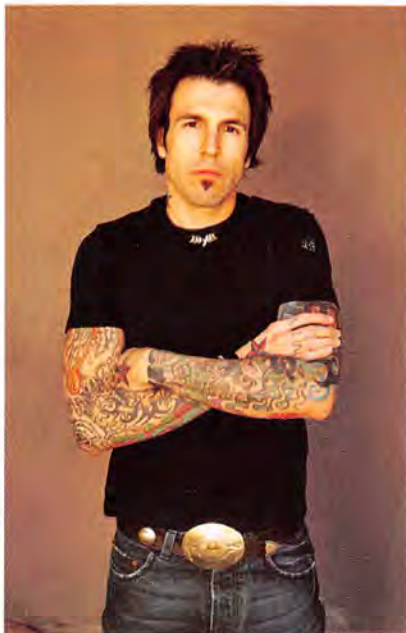
I got to play with a lot of great bands, but I sacrificed a lot, and I'm lucky I survived."

DRUMMER
SAIGON KICK (1988-1996),
SKID ROW (2000-2004)



LECTURER
DEVELOPING A
COOKING SHOW

"ONCE I HIT 40, I got sober. Right now I live in L.A. with my wife, Alisha, and I lecture at colleges behind my documentary, *Waking Up Dead*, which shows the highs of being in a great band and the lows of cocaine overdoses and losing marriages. A lot of people appreciate how honest it is, but there are always some guys who ask, 'How many chicks did you screw?' I also have a development deal to host a cooking show called *Rock Star Recipe*, where I'll have my rock-star friends on." As told to Dan Reilly



DO YOU ROCK?

DAVID BANNER

Does the rapper who once testified in front of Congress indeed ... ROCK?

Ever trashed a hotel room?

I have, but not with the intention of trashing it. There were other things going on at the time.

OK, like what?

Me and a particular female were having a horizontal wrestling match that got out of hand.

Biggest celeb's home you've ever gotten drunk in?

Versace. He was already dead.

Brush with the law?

Anytime you're black and got money there's going to be a problem. I get most of mine from speeding. I do, like, 180 mph.

Stupidest thing you've eaten?

This fat Cambodian lady, when I was 15.

Craziest rider clause?

An albino duck-billed platypus. I haven't found a venue that's been able to get one yet.

It's dinnertime, what's cooking?

Chicken stir-fry. My mother taught me to make it. She's the best cook in the United States.

Jon Coplon



A Cambodian-eating horizontal-wrestler with a fondness for platypuses? David Banner super double rocks!

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NEWS ROUNDUP

Kurt Cobain's ashes were stolen from the pink-and-white teddy-bear-shaped bag where **Courtney Love** kept them, she told a reporter for *News of the World*: "I find it disgusting, and right now I'm suicidal."

After bonding with *Streets of Blood* costar Val Kilmer over a love of vintage vehicles, **50 Cent** gave the actor a car from his collection—a 1965 Chevy Impala worth \$100,000. The two play cops opposite Sharon Stone.



WORD!

"I think he'll marry me to keep me in the country."
M.I.A. on Kanye West, a week before getting engaged to Ben Brewer of the Exit



play

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MOST WANTED SONGS IN AMERICA

No fair! The babelicious-ist babe on the planet also tops this month's chart

1

SCARLETT JOHANSSON

"FALLING DOWN"

ANYWHERE I LAY MY HEAD

It takes a special girl to make an old grizzly bear like Tom Waits sound sexy. Catch the actress turned warbler next month in Woody Allen's steamy *Vicky Cristina Barcelona*.



HOW WE DID IT

aolmusic.com

The Most Wanted Songs chart is based on the number of audience searches, downloads and video plays on AOLmusic.com.

RANK/TITLE	ARTIST	ALBUM/LABEL
1 "FALLING DOWN"	SCARLETT JOHANSSON	ANYWHERE I LAY MY HEAD ATCO
2 "LOLLIPOP"	LIL WAYNE FEAT. STATIC	THA CARTER III CASH MONEY/UNIVERSAL
3 "MERCY"	DUFFY	ROCKFERRY MERCURY
4 "FOREVER"	CHRIS BROWN	EXCLUSIVE JIVE
5 "BYE BYE"	MARIAH CAREY	E=MC ² ISLAND DEF JAM
6 "DAMAGED"	DANITY KANE	WELCOME TO THE DOLLHOUSE BAD BOY
7 "LAST NAME"	CARRIE UNDERWOOD	CARNIVAL RIDE ARISTA/19
8 "VIOLET HILL"	COLDPLAY	VIVA LA VIDA CAPITOL
9 "TAKE A BOW"	RIHANNA	GOOD GIRL GONE BAD: RELOADED DEF JAM
10 "THE BEST DAMN THING"	AVRIL LAVIGNE	THE BEST DAMN THING RCA
11 "IF I NEVER SEE YOUR FACE AGAIN"	MAROON 5 FEAT. RIHANNA	IT WON'T BE SOON BEFORE LONG OCTONE/A&M
12 "PICTURE TO BURN"	TAYLOR SWIFT	TAYLOR SWIFT BIG MACHINE
13 "SHE GOT IT"	2 PISTOLS FEAT. T-PAIN & TAY DIZM	DEATH BEFORE DISHONOR UNIVERSAL REPUBLIC
14 "TEENAGE LOVE AFFAIR"	ALICIA KEYS	AS I AM J
15 "BETTER AS A MEMORY"	KENNY CHESNEY	JUST WHO I AM: POETS & PIRATES RCA
16 "EVERYONE NOSE"	N.E.R.D	SEEING SOUNDS STAR TRAK/INTERSCOPE
17 "7 THINGS"	MILEY CYRUS	BREAKOUT HOLLYWOOD
18 "ELEVATOR"	FLO RIDA	MAIL ON SUNDAY POE BOY/ATLANTIC
19 "LABELS OR LOVE"	FERGIE	SEX AND THE CITY MOVIE SOUNDTRACK NEW LINE
20 "LOVE IN THIS CLUB"	USHER FEAT. YOUNG JEEZY	HERE I STAND LAFACE/ZOMBA
21 "LEAVIN'"	JESSE MCCARTNEY	DEPARTURE HOLLYWOOD
22 "THAT SONG IN MY HEAD"	JULIANNE HOUGH	JULIANNE HOUGH MERCURY/NASHVILLE
23 "DANGEROUS"	KARDINAL OFFISHALL FEAT. AKON	NOT 4 SALE KONLIVE/UNIVERSAL URBAN
24 "YOU BELONG"	HERCULES & LOVE AFFAIR	HERCULES & LOVE AFFAIR MUTE
25 "CHASING PAVEMENT"	ADELE	19 XL
26 "YESTERDAY"	ATMOSPHERE	WHEN LIFE GIVES YOU LEMONS, YOU PAINT THAT SHIT GOLD RHIMESAYERS
27 "WHO'S LADY R U?"	THE NIGHT MARCHERS	SEE YOU IN MAGIC VAGRANT
28 "ON YOUR KNEES"	THE HERBALISER	SAME AS IT EVER WAS IK7
29 "BILLY SAYS GO"	AUDION	BILLY SAYS GO SPECTRAL SOUND
30 "L.E.S. ARTISTES"	SANTOGOLD	SANTOGOLD DOWNTOWN/LIZARD KING
31 "MODERN MYSTERY"	SOMEONE STILL LOVES YOU BORIS YELTSIN	PERSHING POLYVINYL
32 "MAKE THE ROAD BY WALKING"	MENAHAN STREET BAND	MAKE THE ROAD BY WALKING DUNHAM
33 "LIGHTS AND MUSIC"	CUT COPY	IN GHOST COLOURS MODULAR

WEEK ENDING JULY 5, 2008



2 LIL WAYNE FEAT. STATIC

"LOLLIPOP"

THA CARTER III

The best rapper alive got a new toy—a T-Pain talk box!—and he's running wild with it. On his biggest single ever, he trades his usual bonkers punch lines for loving references to his, um, *blow pop*. See him in Baltimore on August 10.



3 DUFFY

"MERCY"

ROCKFERRY

The Amy Winehouse you'd bring home to Mom, Aimee Anne Duffy is a wee Welsh chanteuse with a love for the lush, brassy sounds of '60s Motown. She plays Jersey City's All Points West festival on August 8.

11 MAROON 5 FEAT. RIHANNA

"IF I NEVER SEE YOUR FACE AGAIN"

IT WON'T BE SOON BEFORE LONG

The L.A. hitmakers team up with Ms. "Umbrella" on this sleek salute to one-night stands. M5 tour the East Coast all summer, from Virginia (7/25) to New York (8/12).





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THE COLDPLAY SENSITOID-IN-CHIEF ONCE STABBED SOMEONE, USED TO THINK HE WAS GAY AND DIGS LIN

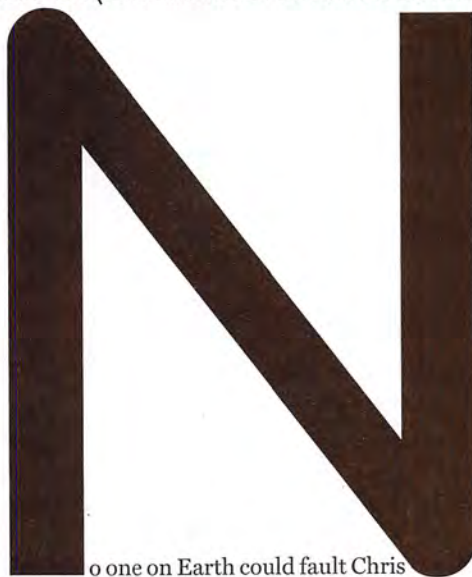




DEAR SUPERSTAR

CHRIS MARTIN

BLICKIT. ALL HIS SECRETS ARE OUT AS HE ANSWERS BLENDER'S READER QUESTIONS BY JONAH WEINER



No one on Earth could fault Chris

Martin's political crusades. He hates poverty. Loves global debt relief. Wants to marry fair trade. But, ducking in to a Korean vegetarian restaurant on a rainy Manhattan afternoon, Coldplay's lead singer unveils his most controversial cause yet: The redemption of Muzak. "This is lovely," he says, gesturing toward the ceiling-mounted speakers, which ooze a tinkling, Asian-ized version of "Ob-la-di, Ob-la-da," all zithers and erhus. "These instruments are so beautiful. It reminds you that bad Muzak is often the composer's fault, not the genre's itself."

Nothing, not even Muzak, is too cheesy for Chris Martin. In fact, the defense of cheese might be the campaign he's most passionate about. The Devon, England-born singer, 31, invests baldly sentimental music with a deep, lived-in sense of yearning; he is an irony-vanquishing, tear-duct-exercising master craftsman of swoons and breakup jams. He's in New York to work on a politician-mocking video for "Violet Hill," the first single from Coldplay's fourth disc, *Viva La Vida*, which offsets Martin's hug-the-world side (the gorgeous, tender piano ballad "Reign of Love") with a newfound musical adventurousness (the booming beat on "Lost!"; the grinding metal riff on "Violet Hill"). The album was completed only after a storm of revisions, rejections and sleepless nights, familiar to anyone who's followed the band's career. Even now that *Viva La Vida* is done, the notoriously insecure singer isn't sure about it. "Some days I feel like I'm in a really good rock band," Martin says. "But I never feel I'm really good." Unsurprisingly, then, the prospect of answering *Blender's* reader questions has him a bit uneasy. "Ready when you are," he says, fidgeting with some chopsticks and eyeing the tape recorder on the table. "But ... am I allowed to skip the ones I don't like?"



**You lost your virginity at 22. Why did it take so long?**

PATOOSH.GP, DEARBORN, MI

► I could never work out how to unbutton trousers. Took me years to get that little hand movement. The truth is, a lot of kids grow up terrified by religion, and I was one of them. It happens to Catholics all over the world. You're spoon-fed what you can and can't do. So I had to work that out. I don't know what I thought God would have done to me, but I could have used some tips from Him. I think when you're a 15-year-old guy, you should be taught how to give somebody an orgasm. Someone should just sit you down and say, "Do this."

You're a champion karaoke contestant. What's the perfect karaoke song?

DAROBSTER, WAYNE, WV

► "(Sittin' on) the Dock of the Bay," by Otis Redding. You can always fall back on "Y.M.C.A." if you're drunk—but if you want to go for the kill, it's soul. I tend not to sing karaoke anymore, though. I find it hard singing to two or three people. It's easier to sing to 3,000, because then I can switch into Coldplay mode. When I'm singing karaoke, I'm just some fucking loser. I *was* a champion, though. I was on holiday about 10 years ago in Tunisia, and two nights in a row I won a competition. I finally got beaten by this fat guy from Burnidge. But where is he now, I ask?

I'm getting married in Kentucky this summer—what would it take to get you to sing "The Scientist" at the ceremony?

A.DOT, LEXINGTON, KY

► What flavor is the cake? If it's vanilla or any kind of fruitcake, I just won't be there. If it's chocolate, tell me the address. I played a friend of a friend's wedding once, and it was a mistake. It's hard if you say, "Who's ready to rock?!" and half the audience goes, "Not me."

What hobby do you spend entirely too much money on?

JERANIUMZ, CALABASAS, CA

► It isn't coke, because I get that for free. I hate shopping, but I do buy a lot of *Curb Your Enthusiasm* DVDs, lose them and then buy them again. And I make a lot of social faux pas. I blame the show—if you watch too much, you think it's all right to talk like Larry David. I met an actor on a film set, and I asked why his trailer was smaller than his costar's. That's not what you ask an actor. It's like walking up to a porn star and saying, "Wow, you're not quite as well hung as the other guy. How do you feel about that?"



FROM TOP: MARTIN HATES BIRTHDAY PARTIES; WITH HOMEY JAY-Z; HIS DVD OBSESSION: ONSTAGE IN 1998, PRE-GWYNETH, PRE-FAME, PRE-FACIAL-HAIR.

**You're famously self-doubting—what do you know you're really good at?**

CARABEE, BETHLEHEM, PA

► Oral sex. And making oatmeal.

What did bullies used to call you?

JULIANFRANK, CULVER CITY, CA

► I didn't have as hard a time in school as some people, but not as easy as others. I got the regular: "Two eyes." "Handsome bastard." "Clever boy." "Hey, muscleman," they used to say. They can be so cruel. A while ago, I bumped into this guy who used to really bully me, and in the interim I'd gotten a foot taller than him, and he'd gotten all fat, and I felt really guilty. Like, *Oh God, he was even more insecure than me.*

My husband and I are expecting our first baby, and we've got the name narrowed down to Papaya, Chewbacca and Sandal. Can you help us pick?

SANDYMARTIN, AUSTIN, TX

► I'm not sure this person is serious, but why can't you have all three? P.C.S. Martin? That'd be classic. People make a big fuss over names. Names of babies, names of albums, names of bands. There's nothing weird about calling your baby Chewbacca if that's what you want to call your baby. It's no stranger than Sarah. A name is just a noise, and if you like it, then fuck what everyone else says.

Why is it that so many rappers love you so damn much?

NASTYASTON, CHICAGO

► I think for the same reason Coldplay love some rappers: We're so alien to each other that it's fascinating. Neither of us understands how the other does what they do. In Devon, no one knows what rap is, or at least they didn't when I grew up there. But working with Jay-Z and Kanye influenced me in terms of their confidence. As English people, we find that hard: You're kind of insecure by nature. So to see someone like that, it's Christmas.

At home, who ends up on diaper duty: You or Gwyneth?

ENTRANCEXIT, LOS ANGELES

► Men should always change diapers. It's a very rewarding experience. It's mentally cleansing. It's like washing dishes, but imagine if the dishes were your kids, so you really love the dishes.

Now that your daughter Apple can talk, what does she say about your music?

ITSMESINDY, FORT WORTH, TX

► I don't feel comfortable with that question. But I will say she loves Madonna.

Do you know how I know you're gay?

HESKYN8, TULSA, OK

► I always thought that joke was kind of funny. We actually have a lot of gay fans,



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PLAYMATES (FROM LEFT): JONNY BUCKLAND, MARTIN, WILL CHAMPION AND GUY BERRYMAN.

and I'm very proud of that. I thought I might be gay when I was 14. Every kid does. You're like, *What's the deal here? What am I?* There was no experimentation, though. My boarding school was right near a girls' school, so there was never any of the *Which one on the desert island would you eat first?*

How'd you get to be the lead singer when Guy Berryman looks like such a badass?
LAZERBLITZ, PROVIDENCE, RI

► I ask myself the same question. My entire life is spent trying to push him forward at photo shoots. He's our packaging. The rest of us look OK, and we work hard to stay thin, but he's a handsome bastard, and none of us pretend that if he wasn't in the band we'd be as popular. He's responsible for all of our calendar sales. I'm so glad that someone pointed that out.

Don't lie: Just how much did you pay for Radiohead's *In Rainbows*?

MORNINGBELLS, PITTSBURGH

► I bought three copies, and paid 10 pounds each, but I never got them. The download thing didn't work. I'm not very good with computers, though, so I think I must have done something wrong. I wound up buying them on vinyl. But I

don't mind. I owe Radiohead a bit more than 30 pounds, let's face it. We owe them a career, really.

Producer Brian Eno had you hypnotized while you were recording the new album. What weird stuff did he make you do while you were under?

74OBLIQUE, MOREHEAD, KY

► We used different instruments and tried to plagiarize the most random stuff: There was a morning when Brian played us a Donna Summer song, "State of Independence," and we played him Limp Bizkit's "Rollin'." He'd never heard of Limp Bizkit, but he liked it. Then we played our instruments under hypnosis to see what the influence was. Brian just made us not worry about what we were doing. He liberated us. And made us sign away the royalties to all our previous records.

On the rare occasions when you drink, what kind of a drunk are you?

YABBADABBAZ, BILLINGS, MT

► Not a very pretty one. I tend to get quite aggressive and a bit too honest. No one's ever said to me, "You were much nicer last night than you are normally." It's always, "You need to go apologize to 73 people."

I tried to be a vegetarian, but bacon cheeseburgers were too hard to quit. What dish do you miss most?

MACALAG, PORT WASHINGTON, NY

► I've been off meat eight years, but I eat fish, so I'm not really vegetarian. After I saw *Babe*, I could never eat pig again. I



LET'S FACE IT: WE OWE RADIOHEAD OUR CAREER.

don't like eating things with hooves—anything that, if their friends hear about it, they could stampede me. I'll never eat crocodile soup or shark fin, because I like going in the ocean and I don't want to meet a cousin. I'm less worried about a school of mackerel. It's about who can get revenge. But barbecued chicken is a big temptation. The last time I broke, I was in Sicily at a photo shoot. I had some chicken because there was nothing else.

Hey, Mr. Nice Guy: What's the meanest thing you've ever done to someone?

IONEYES4533, OMAHA, NE

► When I was 12 or so, I stabbed my brother in the foot with a spade. Brothers and bandmates inspire a kind of rage that's very dangerous. I don't remember what he'd done. He'd probably just been a nob.

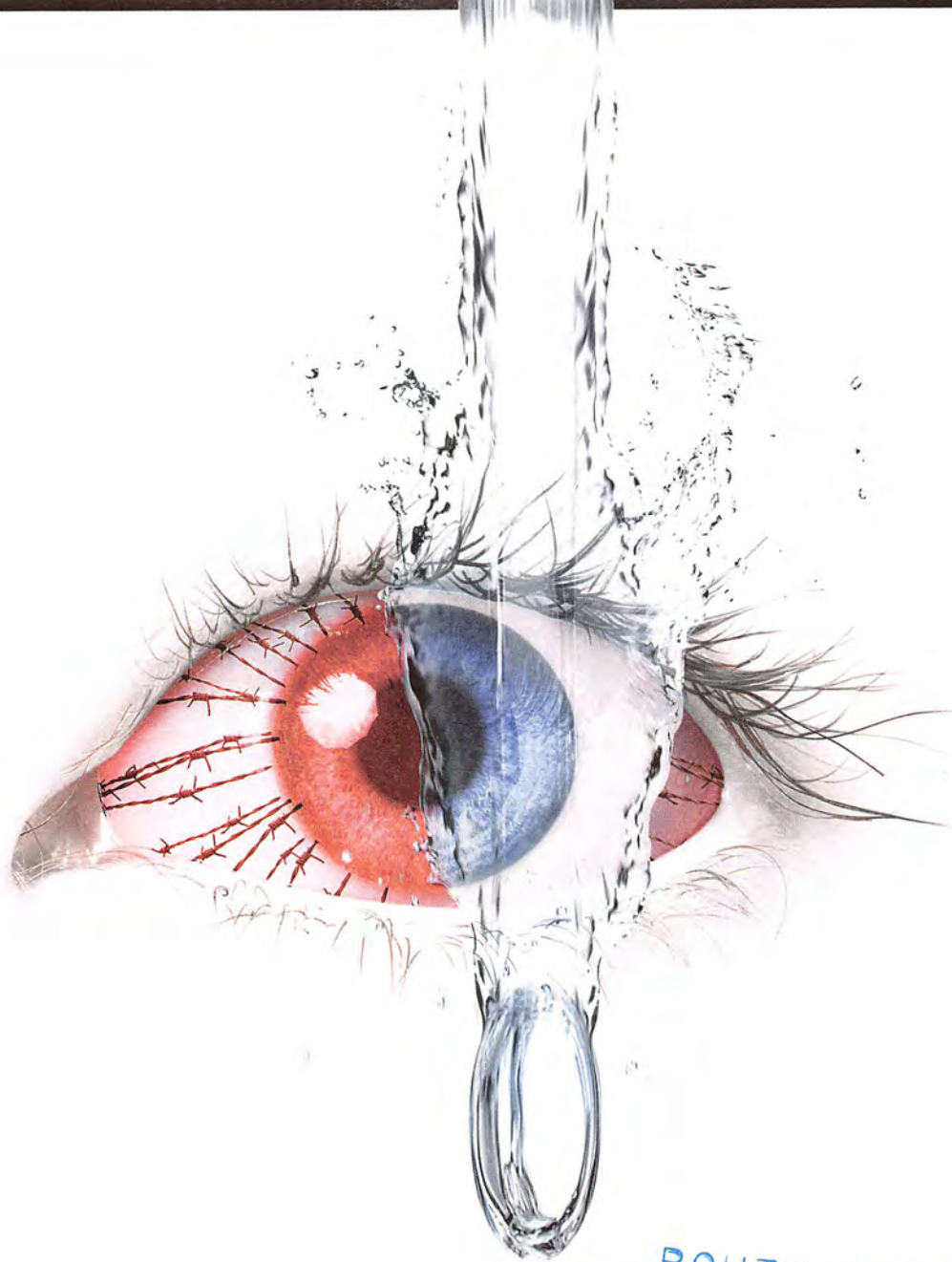
The new album was originally subtitled *Death and All His Friends*—what's the closest you've ever come to dying?

JEFFERSON.MILLER, NEW YORK

► A couple times, on airplanes, we've come under heavy sniper fire—oh, wait, someone else used that. Once we were trying to land in a desert in Ghana, and there was a dust storm, so you couldn't see fuck-all, and the plane didn't have instruments or anything, so it wouldn't guide you in like a jumbo jet. And suddenly the plane dropped to the right, then to the left, and the ground was *right* there. And all I could think was, *Fuck, I didn't finish "Fix You."* That would have been my last thought: *I didn't get that chorus right.* [BLENDER]



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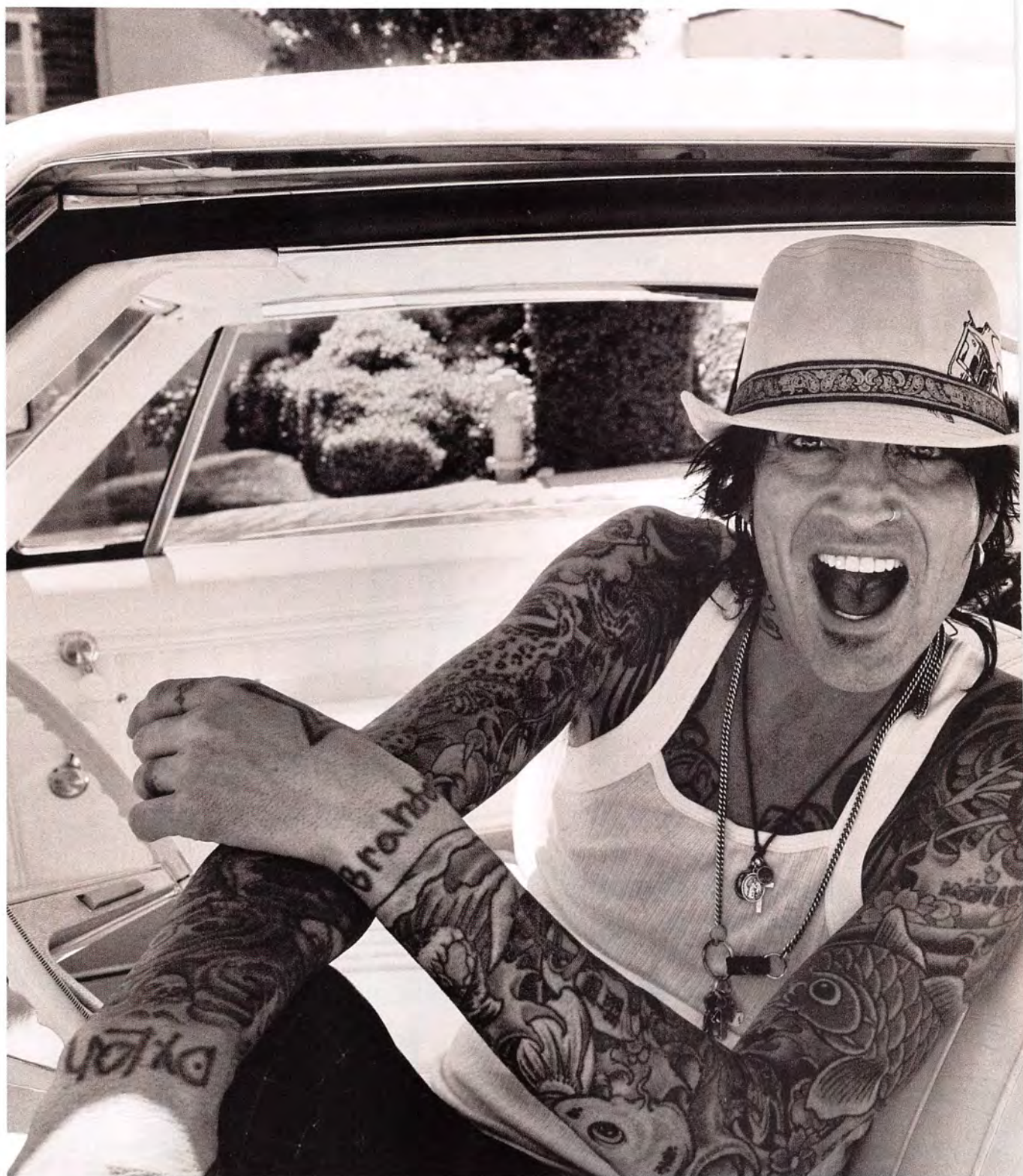
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BY ELIZABETH GOODMAN PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANTONIN KRATOCHVIL



DAY 1

MAY 23, 1:15 P.M.

Guitarist Mick Mars calls us from his home in Malibu, California, and is promptly disconnected by a thunderstorm. He tries again a minute later.

"I'm back! I told you the weather was hideous. I'm having some coffee, and then I'm going into my studio to do some writing. I have lots of musicians coming by. Hinder was here a couple of weeks ago, and I wrote some music with DMC. Instead of sitting and drinking, I'm sitting and writing music.

"Next Thursday we start rehearsing for our Crüe Fest Tour. I'm going to have to start getting myself up at ten. Last night I went to bed at four—I was watching *Black Christmas*. When [the lead character's] little sister was born, he poked out her eyes and ate them. Sometimes slasher films give me weird ideas for music. Oh, and check this out, this is the best: I was watching Discovery or the History Channel or something, and you know how everyone's talking about global warming and all that stuff? The reason it's happening is 'cause they blew a hole in the ozone with all the bombs. During the '50s and '60s, they had all those nuclear tests, like over 600 of 'em. And guess what it was called? Project Greenhouse. I saw that and went, *Uh huh. There we go.*" +

TOMMY LEE: "HEY, LADIES—WHO KNOWS HOW TO DRIVE A STICK?"



DAY 2

MAY 24, 12:30 P.M.

Bassist Nikki Sixx rings us from his home in the San Fernando Valley after a morning at the gym.

"I used to lift a lot of weights. Now I'm doing Pilates and running instead. I run in my neighborhood with Kat [Von D, TV tattoo artist and Sixx's girlfriend]. She has as many tattoos as I do, so we're quite the sight in my Stepford community. I never looked at tattoos as

part of an image, but it's become a staple in 'the look,' like the flannel shirt.

This morning, this lady in Starbucks told me, 'You're like a super rocker guy.' I go, 'Why?' She goes, 'You have all the tattoos.' I'm like, 'Yeah, I'm pretty much a cliché.'

"This afternoon I'm going out with my sister and my son in my Bentley Continental Flying Spur. I'm the worst driver ever. I've lost my license three times. I guess I have a bit of a speeding problem. [To his daughter, Storm]:

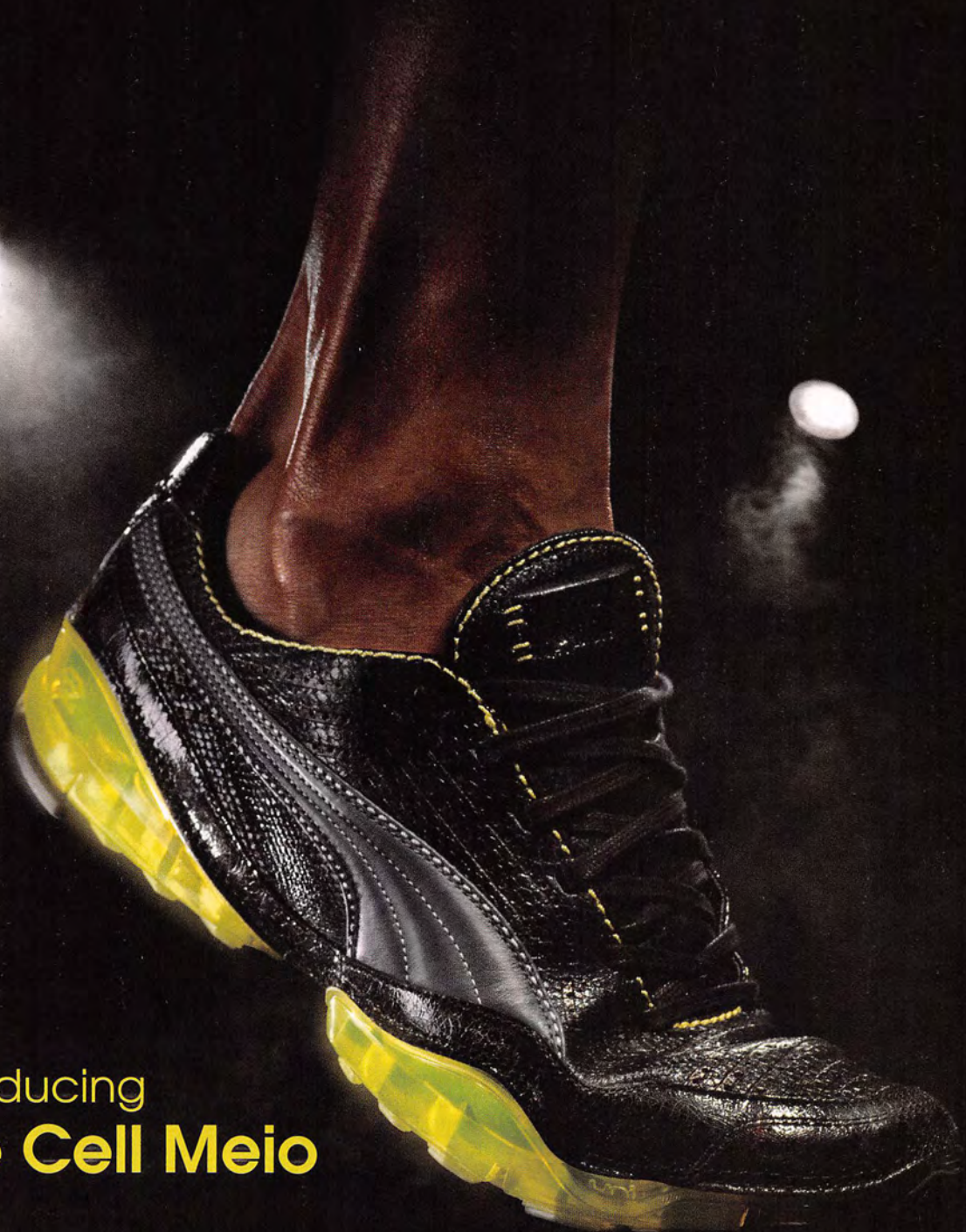
What do you think, Storm? Ha! She goes, 'You always get out of it by going: "I'm Nikki Sixx!"'"

DAY 3

MAY 26, 1:37 P.M.

After taking Sunday off, drummer Tommy Lee phones on his way to meet his kids and ex-wife Pamela Anderson for a Memorial Day barbecue.

"Right now I'm cruising in my '68 Chevy Impala lowrider, heading over to



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—VINCE NEIL



Malibu to play with my boys. It's a yellow sparkly gold color, with all white interior and bright yellow carpet. I'm down to the ground on the freeway, bouncing all over the place. It's a nightmare!

"Yesterday I had a shoot with Ludacris. We're doing this TV show called *Battleground Earth*, for Discovery Channel's new network, Planet Green. It's going to be, like, 24/7, all eco-green shit. I've learned so much! I'm about to go solar and get totally off the grid. I will not have an electric bill! All the grass on my property is going to be replaced—this shit, I'm telling you, it doesn't smell, but it looks and feels exactly like real grass. No watering, no pesticides or fertilizers. It's insane.

"I'm also a vegetarian now, but you know what I did the other day, purely out of habit? I grabbed a pack of beef jerky

and just fucking devoured it. I went, *Oh, my God! Wait—that's beef!* I was so upset with myself. I had to tell everyone. I was like, 'OK, guys, I just ate a piece of beef jerky.' I couldn't hold it in."

DAY 4

MAY 27, 12:15 P.M.

A few minutes after waking up, Mars calls from home with the latest update.

"I don't know what I'm going to do today. Maybe sleep. If I could go places I would, but I'm stuck. This stuff I have [Ankylosing Spondylitis, a form of degenerative arthritis the guitarist has been battling since he was 19] won't allow me to move my head, so I can't drive. It's quite an inconvenience. Right now I'm doing stuff online, answering e-mails. And drinking coffee, of course—that's a necessity of life. If they bled me,

they'd just get coffee.

"I don't eat that much. Usually, like, a piece of string cheese or something for lunch. My girlfriend's sister wants to cook for me, but I've got to lose another four or five pounds. This AS crap has shrunk me down really small. I used to be almost five-foot-nine, and I'm just a little over five-three now. It stinks. I'm all good and healthy—I take lots of vitamins. I'm just squashed."

DAY 5

MAY 28, 6:04 P.M.

Singer Vince Neil, rested from a weekend in Bermuda, dials from his home in San Francisco, where he's waiting to have his pool retiled.

"I'm an early riser—I got up around 7:30 this morning and had some cereal and a banana. Then ... God, what did +

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I do today? I have such bad short-term memory. Um ... um ... um—oh, yeah! My wife hit a deer on Monday and tore the shit out of the side of her Mercedes, so I had to take that down and get estimates on the damage. She was OK, but it freaked her out. Fucking deer. Then we just barbecued on the grill out back by the pool. Chicken and corn on the cob.

"I'm trying to stick around the house as much as possible, because I've gotta go to Los Angeles tomorrow to start tour rehearsals and I'll be living in a hotel. I mean, it's the Four Seasons in Beverly Hills, but it's still a hotel. I'll be away from home, and it kind of sucks. I just sit in my room and watch, like, *Top Chef* and *Wife Swap*. I've been on tour all year with my solo band, and I've already been singing all the songs, so I'm not really the one that needs to work. Nobody else has played these songs in probably a year and a half—it's going to take those guys a while to get up to speed. I don't really see myself working a whole lot next week."

**I QUIT DRUGS,
SMOKING AND
DRINKING.
I'M EMO. I DON'T
EVEN LIKE
MY COFFEE THAT
HOT.**
—NIKKI SIXX

DAY 6

MAY 29, 3:16 P.M.

On his way to Spike's Guys' Choice Awards, Sixx calls to discuss the first day of rehearsals.

"When you've been playing together this long, it comes back pretty quickly. We've done it all, and it doesn't seem like anything beyond the apocalypse is going to stop us. We must be the evil spawn of Keith Richards. As we breed, we're spreading this indestructible human race. Except for me and Tommy—we got snipped. Nothing like shooting blanks to ensure a good time! In my couple of years being single, I was just waiting for someone to come and say, 'I'm pregnant,' and I would be able to say, 'Ain't gonna happen, gold digger!'"

"I quit drugs, smoking and drinking, so I'm basically a fucking monk now. I don't even like my coffee that hot. I'm slowly regressing into an emo version of Nikki Sixx. I'm the tree-hugging, Madonna-listening fucking whatever. Although I hate the new Madonna record. When you hit 40 and you're trying to squeeze into those Forever 21 jeans, I don't care how good of shape you're in, you're officially a cougar. But I guess I'd be a cougar, too. I'm still squeezing into tight jeans."

DAY 7

MAY 30, 4:34 P.M.

About to fly home for the weekend, Neil phones us on his way to the airport.

"I'm trying to get everything together, because when I come back on Monday I have to be packed for the tour. I pretty much wear the same thing every day: shoes, shirts, jeans. Oh, and I never go on tour without my hair dryer. It's a Conair."

"Rehearsals are great. We didn't record together in the studio, so it takes a little while to learn the new stuff. It's like learning a song off the radio: Nikki tries to figure out what he did on bass, Mick tries to figure out what he did on guitar. And since we worked separately, it's been months since I've seen everyone in the same room together. But it's cool—at least we're all getting along." [BLENDER]



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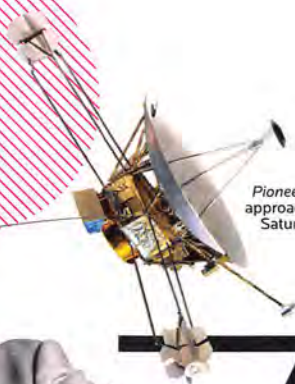
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Michael Jackson's *Off the Wall* is released.

Atari introduces its new home computer.



Pioneer 11 approaches Saturn.



Apocalypse Now debuts in theaters.



Saddam Hussein is president of Iraq.



U2 release their first single.



M

"POP MUZIK"

How an advertising-obsessed Brit tried to write a three-minute encapsulation of pop history—and failed magnificently **BY MARK YARM**



It was 1978, and Robin Scott knew he had everything he needed for a hit single: a concept (a self-reflexive ad for pop music), a chorus (a call-out of cities, nodding to pop's global reach), even a marketing plan (recording under a mysterious moniker). All the pieces were in place except one: the music. Scott had tried an R&B approach and worked up a funk version, but neither was right. He was stuck. "I thought, *It's got to be right, or you'll blow it*," he tells *Blender*.

If all this sounds backward—marketing plan first, song second—there's a reason. Scott came of age as an art student in late-'60s London, and one of his pals was concept-obsessed Malcolm McLaren, who would go on to assemble, manage and mercilessly hype the Sex Pistols. Scott spent the early '70s playing in London pub-rock bands; meanwhile, he maintained his friendship with McLaren and, as punk exploded in 1976 and 1977, hobnobbed with the likes of the Pistols and the Clash.

While living in Paris, an idea came to Scott: He'd encapsulate the last 25 years of popular music in a three-minute song. He wrote lyrics that were part patty-cake rhyme, part free-associative capitalist critique, and a refrain ("Talk about pop music"). For his alias, he chose M, inspired by signs for the Paris Metro: "I was obsessed with this emerging phenomenon of 'brands' and the idea of manipulating people."

After deciding that his first two versions of the song felt too genre-specific for his grand ambitions, though, he paid a visit to

a pal, John Lewis, who specialized in sequencing, a technology that would give rise to sampling. Lewis arranged a bouncy electronic rhythm, and Scott fleshed it out with studio musicians, striking upon a nagging three-chord melody. Scott's half-spoken declamations fit in with the mechanical-yet-warm vibe, and the girl-group-styled *shoobie doobie doo-wop* backing vocals added a layer of playfulness.

VITAL STATISTICS

Album *New York—London—Paris—Munich*
Label Sire
Performers Robin Scott (vocals, guitar); Julian Scott (bass); Wally Badarou (keyboards); John Lewis (synths); Brigit Novik (vocals)
Writer Scott
Producer Scott
Chart debut August 11, 1979
Highest chart position 1

The end result didn't capture a quarter century of pop music, but it did usher in the dominant sound of the '80s. "Pop Muzik" was the beginning of the electronica age," McLaren says. "And all the groups that came after—Soft Cell, Duran Duran, the Human League and Gary Numan." The song reached No. 1 in the U.S.—the only stateside hit for M, who would follow up with four increasingly experimental albums.

"Pop Muzik" has been covered numerous times, but it got its biggest homage during U2's 1997-'98 Pop Mart Tour, when the band took the stage every night to a dance remix. "I'm happy with anybody doing whatever the hell they like with it," Scott says, laughing. "It's part of the public domain, really—except I still get the royalties!" [BLENDER]



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STATION TO STATION BY ROB SHEFFIELD

God's Own Bar Band

HOW DOES A GROUP THAT LOOKS AS ORDINARY AS THE **HOLD STEADY** MAKE SUCH EXTRAORDINARY MUSIC? BY INTRODUCING JOE STRUMMER TO JOE WALSH, OF COURSE!

THE FIRST TIME I saw the Hold Steady get up onstage, I literally laughed at how geeky they looked. These guys definitely did not resemble a rock band; in their alligator shirts and slacks, they seemed more like a pickup softball team of tipsy paralegals. They were opening for Les Savy Fav in Brooklyn, nearly five years ago, and they cracked me up just plugging in. They started to play a positive jam about American history, and I laughed harder. Then they did a song about a girl who doesn't feel too sweet about the places she has to go to get some sleep. I wasn't laughing now. Craig Finn spluttered to himself, making the sign of the cross between choruses, while Tad Kubler played gung-ho beer-commercial riffs with truly appalling enthusiasm. Thirty seconds into "Killer Parties," I had a new favorite band, and they've kept trolling ever since, banging out four great albums in five years. They still crack me up just plugging in.

Stay Positive is the first album you could describe as your typical Hold Steady record. It has everything you'd expect God's bar band to bring to the party: drugs, dirt, dementia, Catholic damage, greasy-fries guitar, over-the-top keyboards, a singer gossiping about doomed friends he doesn't bother to introduce. These Brooklyn-via-Minneapolis dudes mix the cheesiest classic rock with the trashiest punk, saluting Joe Strummer and Joe Walsh at the same time, with Finn's word-drunk motormouth poetry on top. They revel in jokes that echo from song to song, characters who show up album after album (Gideon? Holly? Charlemagne? Who *are* these kids?), local references most of us can only pretend to get, especially if we're not from the Midwest. Like Axl Rose, they know how to end a song with a lethal one-

liner. (My favorite: "I did a couple favors for some guys who looked like Tusken Raiders.") But they also know how to tell a sad story, in Bruce Springsteen territory. If "Killer Parties" was "The Promised Land" without promises or land, "You Can Make Him Like You" was "Candy's Room" without candy or a room.

According to my iPod, I've played the new "Sequestered in Memphis" 38 times in the last 24 hours, but I'm still trying to figure it out. The Hold Steady goof on the groovy '70s-radio rock they sincerely admire, with a not-remotely-ironic horn





Henry Obasi

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STATION TO STATION A HOLD STEADY SIX-PACK

● "Barfruit Blues"

Can you really get a bloody nose from sniffing margarita mix? This rowdy guitar rave gives you the horrible feeling that somebody found out the hard way. *The Hold Steady Almost Killed Me*, 2004

● "Curves & Nerves"

A chronicle of the sad plight of Holly, the hoodrat girl who went to L.A., only to end up in movies like *North Dallas Forty* and *Revenge of the Nerds*. B-side, 2004

● "You Can Make Him Like You"

An urgent piano hook that gets sadder every time it repeats, and a girl who lets her boyfriend deal with the dealers, until she starts wanting to get high alone. *Boys and Girls in America*, 2006

● "Your Little Hoodrat Friend"

Holly hits bottom, gets born again and rises from the dead like Jesus—only to find out that's just the start of yet another scary story. *Separation Sunday*, 2005

● "212 Margarita"

A cafe ballad with girls named Margarita ("I'm green/And I'm misleading") and Bloody Mary ("I'm nice and I'm spicy/And I'm your only sure shot at recovery"). *The Virgin Digital Sessions*, 2005

● "Nassau Coliseum"

An old gem from Finn's '90s Minneapolis band, Lifter Puller, about an ex-girlfriend who fell off the porch and out of her dress. *Half Dead and Dynamite*, 1997

section (welcome to Miller time!) and a hairy organ solo (*whoa*, Schlitz *does* rock America!), yet you can tell it's them before the vocal even starts. Like most Hold Steady songs about women, it's friendly yet deeply confused, and shockingly, it starts in a bar. Finn confesses, "We didn't go back to her place/We went to some place where she cat sits"—most bands would build a whole verse if not an entire song around a detail like that, but here it's just another frazzled memory in a story Finn's having trouble telling the same way twice. It's the least word-heavy thing they've ever done, and there's a lazy grin in the melody; it all sounds laid-back, and since I hate music that is laid-back, or even lying at a semi-backward angle, I'm a little disgusted at how brilliant this is.

Stay Positive is their loving parody of the '80s straight-edge hardcore youth-unity anthems they grew up on. "Constructive Summer" and "Stay Positive" blatantly evoke the days when punk bands like SS Decontrol did anti-smoking rants ("Don't you dare steal my air/Because I care") and Crucial Youth were chanting "Four Rules" ("Be straight, don't be late/Bench your weight, don't masturbate"). The Hold Steady love to take the piss out of hardcore, with their gags about "unifying the scene" and "all-ages hardcore matinee shows." But when Finn begins the album with the mock-Fugazi motto, "Let this be my annual reminder that we could all be something bigger," part of the joke is that he's not joking.

It's been a bizarrely quick rise for the Hold Steady—just a few years from wiseass lyrics like "tramps like us and we like tramps" all the way to Craig Finn singing "Rosalita" with the Boss himself at Carnegie Hall last year. It's safe to say that in 2004, the world's biggest Hold Steady fan did not envision the band opening for the Stones at Slane Castle in Dublin or becoming Harry Potter's favorite group. Like so many indie punks, the Hold Steady revealed in theoretical populism, making cracks about how they set out to be just another bar band—except their populism got even stranger as it got less theoretical. Nickelback they're never going to be, but it's profoundly weird how many people out there were jonesing for a band like this, and that it took no time at all for the band and the fans to find one another. I got my first hint in early 2004, right before their debut album, when I met a guy from Maine outside a sold-out show on the Lower East Side. He'd downloaded some of their live stuff, decided this was now his favorite band and driven across six state lines without even a ticket. He got in by waiting around, smiling at the bouncers and asking politely (nobody ever tries that in New York, but it worked). I thought, *Damn, if this guy has already heard of the Hold Steady, there's no stopping them, because he's exactly the fan they need.*

There's a lot of This Guy at a Hold Steady show, and the band knows it. They're the only group I've ever seen dedicate songs to the fans who had to hire babysitters, and the only group whose fans are so old-school they hold up lighters instead of phones. I've witnessed grown men get into fights at three different Hold Steady shows, not because there's anything violent about the music, but because This Guy hasn't been out drinking beer and rocking in a while, and he forgets he's not as tough as he used to be.

Finn keeps getting compared to Bruce Springsteen, but he really reminds me of LCD Soundsystem's James Murphy, one of the only musicians out there who's written as many of this century's best songs. He's another urban Irish blackguard obsessed with subcultures and their shared secrets, singing about how musical memories warp everything else in your life, especially when you're a scenester outgrowing your scene. LCD Soundsystem play mix-and-match with '90s dance styles the way the Hold Steady slop around with their retro rock riffs. "All My Friends," Murphy's elegiac ode to the giant Ecstasy comedown of the late '90s, tells the same story as "Killer Parties"—it's just a different bunch of friends, trying to hold their lives together when the music they share falls apart. But maybe I love both of these bands because they openly mock the idea that music is not the most important thing in life.

Where do the Hold Steady go now? Who knows? They've already made four terrific albums, with only a handful of weak tunes. My favorite is *The Hold Steady Almost Killed Me*, partly because it's the first I heard, but mainly because it has the most guitar and the punchiest sound. *Stay Positive* is the first that doesn't set out to shake up their game, a milestone in itself for guys who've always fantasized about being road-weary classic-rock journeymen, even before anybody heard of them. ("We set out to make a record a year," Finn once told *The Village Voice*. "Which keeps us from getting stuck or going off the rails, but it also means every one isn't going to be your masterpiece.") Yet even when they try to play it straight, they can't stop compulsively celebrating punk rock as the dumb democratic yowl it was always meant to be.

For me, the one that sums up that celebration is "Sweet Payne," from *The Hold Steady Almost Killed Me*. "I always dream about a unified scene," Finn announces over hilariously botched power chords. "There's James King, and King James, and James Dean/At a table in the corner of my unified scene." It's a joke, but you can hear that the Hold Steady are mocking the dream because it's theirs, or at least a dream they'll occasionally admit to themselves. And you can hear that even though they should know better, they're passionately in love with it. [BLENDER]



YOUTUBE PEEP SHOW SQUIRM-GASM!

Did the world really need more *Peep Show*? Afraid so. David Mitchell and Robert Webb (above) are the Hall & Oates of London meta-erotic comedy, playing two clingy roommates bent on sabotaging each other's pitiful lives. The new season on Britain's Channel 4 is a corker, and isn't hard to find online, if YouTube know what I mean. As always, the scenes are shot from the characters' points of view (the actors wear cameras on their heads), which makes their sexual humiliations and drug debacles even more squirm-gasmic. So far this season, Mitchell tries speed dating, plays in a terrible band with a junkie named Super Hans and argues about taping all the remotes together into one big Megatron ("The Megatron doesn't say urban freewheelers—it says sofa masturbators"). But the best is when Webb tells his hot date about his disease: "It's the best STD! Just cute old mostly-symptomless chlamydia!" Genius, obviously.

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BLUNDER

JACK BLACK WENT FROM DRUG-MUNCHING FRINGE-COMEDY WEIRDO TO BOX-OFFICE-STORMING FATHER OF TWO.

BLENDER GRILLS THE *TROPIC THUNDER* STAR ABOUT:

- **PHARMACEUTICAL EXPERIMENTATION** (ACID IN NINTH GRADE!)
- **THE SECRET TO A PERFECT WEDDING** (ONLY INVITE STUFFED ANIMALS)
- **HOLLYWOOD SUCCESS** ("I STILL FEEL LIKE A LOSER")

BY **MICHAEL JOSEPH GROSS**
PHOTOGRAPHS BY **GAVIN BOND**



BLACK STRUTS INTO THE BEVERLY HILLS

Hotel in baggy cutoff gray sweat-pants and boxy black shoes—shoulders back, belly out, face wide as a welcome mat. Practically everybody in the lobby says hello, and Black answers politely, without ever stopping. After passing one especially solicitous fan, he sounds a little guilty: “That dude was so looking for a rainbow connection. But sometimes you just don’t have the energy.”

Black’s manic energy, these days, is spread thin. He returned to L.A. last night after a three-day blitz of Australia for the opening of *Kung Fu Panda* just in time to celebrate his son Samuel’s second

birthday. (He and his wife of more than two years, the musician Tanya Haden, also have a newborn named Thomas.) Right now, Black has a full beard and long frosted tips, the remnants of the dye job he got while playing the bleached-blond, drug-addled comedian Jeff Portnoy in Ben Stiller’s *Tropic Thunder*, a sprawling Hollywood satire about the making of the movie of a spurious Vietnam War memoir. He’s wearing a T-shirt showing howling wolves in a birch forest, a souvenir from Truth or Consequences, New Mexico, where he filmed Harold Ramis’s biblical-era comedy *Year One*, which comes out next year. He just put the finishing touches on *Complete Masterworks II*, the second DVD collection from his rock band, Tenacious D. (It includes a documentary about the band that is, he says, “kind of like *An Inconvenient Truth*, but with higher stakes.”) And he and Tanya have been collecting the songs and lullabies they make up for their kids with the idea of a possible children’s album.

As we settle in at a banquet in the back of the Polo Lounge, he slouches down and covers his chest and stomach with a big white napkin, as if it were a bib. He’s eager for feedback on *Tropic Thunder*, which, he says “does for actors what *Zoolander* did for male models.” He thinks it’s more vicious than *Zoolander* (“You can be meaner if you’re making fun of a club that you’re a member of”), but he also thinks the world—especially the world of Hollywood—is ready for a movie that tears apart Hollywood artifice. “When cheese starts getting too high and people are choking on it, they need a good dose of cynicism to flush it out. Clean the pipes. It’s like Drano,” he says.

Stiller, for his part, says he loves the guilelessness of Black’s performance: “It’s striking how often Jack will go straight to playing the innocent, wide-eyed gullible guy. I also see that in the fantasy world that he’s created with Tenacious D, all the Dungeons & Dragons imagery.”

Stiller, who has two kids of his own, adds, “We’re getting to an age where it’s like, *Wow, all of the sudden we’re seriously adults*. He [Black] is still so in touch with the kid.”

But Black’s own childhood, after his parents’ acrimonious divorce when he was 10, was anything but innocent. So that’s where we start a three-hour conversation about growing up, taking drugs and getting married surrounded by puppets.

You play an addict in *Tropic Thunder*. You did some really hard drugs when you were pretty young. How did that happen?

In ninth grade, I did acid and cocaine. I wanted desperately to be an American badass. There’s something so romantic, when you’re a kid, about being a criminal. You want to belong to the tough-guy club. Running from the cops. Hiding in the bushes. Making schemes and plans to get it over on the Man.

Did anything good come of trying the drugs?

I don’t think so, but I had a lot of fun when I did the acid,

laughing harder than I ever had, seeing the absurdity in life in a way that I’d never really considered. I was whole for the first time ever, like, *The whole universe makes sense*. But then later that night I couldn’t go to bed, and I wanted it to be over. It wasn’t funny anymore, the universe no longer made sense, and I was stuck in this prison in my brain for, like, six hours. I only had, like, one hour of absolute bliss. So the pain outweighed the glory, and I never wanted to do it since. Maybe the experimentation prevented later abuse, because I did not party nearly as hard as the other kids in high school and college.

Your character has some major withdrawal symptoms. Did you ever go through that?

I’ve never had to detox. So I asked Robert Downey Jr. for some advice. He was cryptic. He didn’t really tell me what he went through. He just said, “Three things. If you’re kicking, three things you’ve got to know: You need a bucket, a chocolate bar and Gatorade.” The chocolate bar, because, you know, your body needs the sugar. That’s all you can hold down, I guess. You need Gatorade because you’re going to be vomiting so much and crapping so much. And the bucket for the vomit and crap.

Did you ever try heroin?

Once, many years ago. Somebody gave me a small amount of it in an envelope and I kept it for months. I didn’t want to use it, but I didn’t want to throw it away, either, because I was always curious about it. The legend is that it’s the best feeling in the universe. Ten times better than sex, but very dangerous, and you end up dying, choking on your own vomit. And also the legend is if you take it and you write, like, “Stairway to Heaven” or something—it makes you a genius.

Did it make you a genius?

No! No! No! Nothing came from it. This was the late ’90s. My girlfriend at the time was there, and I snorted it, but she didn’t know I did it. It didn’t agree with me. I couldn’t really feel my legs, and my heart felt like it was slowing down too much. I thought, *Oh, my God, it’s just going to shut me down. I’m going to die*. So I told my girlfriend, “I’m going to take a walk.” I went down to the 7-Eleven at the bottom of the hill, and I had this strange sensation that my legs were pumping, but the feet were just sort of lifeless stumps. I did a little shopping and then walked back up the hill and survived. And never did it again.

With fatherhood, did you give up all the hard stuff?

Oh yeah. I was already pretty mellow before having the babes. I haven’t been partying for years. And now that I’ve had my babes, there’s no real nightlife. Not that I really want to anyway. A lot of creepy crawlies out there.

Do you even smoke anymore?

Very little. There is an occasional celebratory jay, but it’s not a wake-and-bake scenario anymore at all. And no cigarettes. To help stop, I took Wellbutrin for two years, and then I stopped the Wellbutrin before *Tropic Thunder*. They say you’ve got to be careful quitting Wellbutrin because some people have withdrawal symptoms. And I was like, “Good! That’s the movie. That’s what I need! Withdrawal symptoms!” I didn’t have shakes and crazy quakes—it feels like your brain is sucking in on itself, like there’s a small black hole in the center of your brain galaxy. But it only lasted for a couple of weeks, and then I was back to normal. I did have a celebratory cigar when we had the baby a couple of weeks ago. I should have brought you a cigar. I’ve got a bunch I haven’t given away.

How do you keep track of your 2-year-old’s latest and greatest accomplishments?

I’m not a jotter-downer. I’m a videoer. And Samuel is making big breakthroughs, painting and dancing and talking. He doesn’t have sentence structure down yet, so everything he says is really funny. Like, he’s not really sure about *out* and *in*. Sometimes he says, “I wan’ go iinnnn,” but it really means *out*. And we’ve got this game where we pretend he’s got superpowers—like, if he blows wind at me, I fly away out of the room screaming because the



....And that's how Jack Black lost his right pinkie.

power of his exhale is so incredible. He does it whenever he's taking a turd. He wants privacy. He blows everyone out of the room. Little babies, they're just surviving, like we all are. Finding ways to make life more livable and more enjoyable. They are super-delicate, very fragile. Tommy is still like a fetus. Completely helpless. Pretty irresistible, too. He's got a turtledove quality.

IN HONOR OF THE TURTLEDOVE, WE BUY A COUPLE OF DAVIDOFF cigars in the hotel gift shop, then wander the maze-like paths of the grounds in search of a place to blaze up, coming to a side entrance to the Polo Lounge, which we just left 15 minutes ago.

"Would it be terrible to go back through here?" he asks, and pushes the door open. We walk through the restaurant again, and the scene is like something out of *Groundhog Day*. The same sycophants give him the same looks and say the same things. The only difference this time is that a woman at a table licks her extra-large, Angelina Jolie-size lips and says, "You're lucky you're married."

"I think, if I weren't married, I could be getting laid," he says as we walk past.

Then beyond a white gazebo we find ourselves atop a concrete stairway overlooking the service entrance to the hotel. We sit down amid all the tanks and air-conditioning units and garbage bins that make the outrageous luxury of this place possible and talk about grown-up stuff.

What do you weigh?

I'm not telling. It's in the twos.

You used to say that you wanted to be thinner.

I still want to be thinner.

Why?

So I'll live longer. Sometimes I'll get on the scale, and I'll push on something with my hands to take some of the load off and see how it would feel on my bones and legs if I only weighed 150. And I'm like, *Oh, that feels good*. That is a good reason to lose weight

"EVEN THOUGH THINGS ARE GOING GREAT IN MY CAREER RIGHT NOW, **I STILL FEEL LIKE THE LOSER. THE OUTSIDER.** I'M IN THE CLUB, BUT I'M STILL ON THE FRINGE."



right there—just to be able to be more physical, pain-free.

Have you ever really tried to lose weight?

In bits and pieces. I'm just afraid of being hungry. That's what it is. It's fear.

Why fear?

I don't know. Like, last night, Tanya bought burritos so there'd be something yummy to eat when I got home from Australia. I had the bean-and-cheese burrito, which was delicious, and I watched the Lakers game. But then I was like, *I'm still hungry, and I can't go to sleep like this. I'd better eat that other steak burrito that's in the refrigerator before I go to bed*. Was I afraid to go to sleep without eating? I don't know.

What was your wedding like?

We eloped. We went to Big Sur. Stayed at the Post Ranch Inn in one of these little hobbit cottages, with a telescope in your room so you can look out at the whales going by. Migrating whales. It was great. They had a special package deal where you can get married by a woman named Soaring—spelled like a soaring eagle. The ceremony was pretty hippie, spacey and nondenominational. We cracked up a couple of times.

Nobody else was there?

Just us, Soaring, a photographer and Tanya's stuffed animals. She has a bunch of stuffed animals that she gives voice to. She's done a lot of puppet shows actually, but not for kids. Like, she has one character called Imaginary Bear, who would go through a lot of tough, tough times and have to go to rehab and deal with lots of drug overdoses and stuff. All her animals and characters were there—Quacker, Imaginary Bear, Pee, Richard, Harold—and they were the witnesses. Then we had a big party later, back in L.A. We invited a couple hundred people, had a dance party



and did a little puppet show all about Quacker, the duck, who was a little bit pissed off because he was best friends with Tanya. A slide show that he narrated told the story of how we came together and fell in love, and how he was crushed by loneliness. But then he found love, too, and made some babies and started a life of his own. He had a happy ending.

Now that you're settled down, does Tenacious D play a different role in your life?

Yes and no. It was always just a fun thing that we could do, to go out and blow people's minds with our ridiculousness. Very much cardboard-box-and-duct-tape-style entertainment—butt-flap theater. And it's still that. I still look forward to partying with Kyle [Gass] and doing dumb and interesting stuff.

But does it ever feel disingenuous, to be such a mainstream success now and always be playing the outsider?

Even though I've got a career going and things are going great, I still feel like the loser, the outsider. I'm in the club, but I'm still on the fringe. I never feel like I'm playing a character. I'm just being myself—maybe a slightly dumber version of myself. With the D, I'm just singing songs that I think are funny. That never feels wrong to me.

Have you been reading anything good lately?

Frankenstein, by Mary Shelley. It's my wife's favorite book. A guy she dated in her youth, who went on to become a rock star, did his thesis on *Frankenstein* when he was in college. I got retroactively jealous of him, and I thought, *Fuck that! I'm going to be just as knowledgeable as him so she won't leave me for her old sweetheart*. It was really stupid. But I loved it, so I got something good out of it.

What did you like about it?

How awesome the monster was. My idea of him from the movies is just this big dumb guy that has no brains. He's like, *Aaah, I am really scared of fire*. He wasn't fucking scared of fire. He was so much better than that. He was way smarter than you, way faster. He ran like a cheetah. A nightmarish creature, but

with a soul too. He was tortured by his outsidership, that he wasn't allowed to live in this beautiful world. He could appreciate the beauty and longed so desperately to be part of it.

IT'S TIME TO GO. HE'S WORRIED, BECAUSE HIS NEWBORN IS SICK, his usual pharmacy is out of the medicine the baby needs and he has to find a place that has it. We climb into his big black Lexus and he calls his pediatrician over and over, finally getting through and locating a drugstore that has the goods. But getting there is another matter: The stop-and-go traffic on Sunset is just this side of gridlock.

In the midst of this very adult quandary, he transforms his frustration into adolescent mockery. He gestures to cars all around us: "What are they doing here? Chasing the dream?" The faux wonderment morphs quickly into the real thing. "Did you ever read the old John Fante book *Ask the Dust*?" he asks. "He describes driving from downtown L.A. to the beach in Santa Monica without stopping once for a light. That's how it was in the Depression era. There was no one here. It was just the movie people in the desert."

Then, as if things have become a bit too earnest, he turns the ridicule on himself, belting out the *All in the Family* theme in his best Edith Bunker voice: "*Those were the days*. Sing it, people. *You knew who you were then. Girls were girls and men were men ...*"

Like most of Jack Black's best performances, this one melds sweetness and cynicism into some strange in-between that's so hard to name all you can do is laugh. [BLENDER]



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Black covers his favorite Pete Townshend song.



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**BLENDER'S
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THE FUTURE OF GRID-
IRON, GUN-TOTING,
AX-GRINDING
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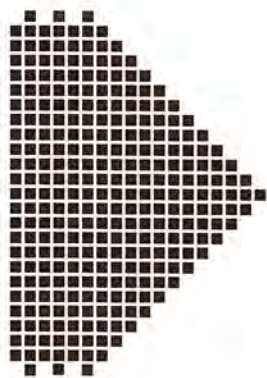
STARRING
Aerosmith,
John Madden
and 140,000
karaoke
superstars



VIDEO SAVES THE RADIO STAR

GAMES ARE THE NEW ITUNES FOR SINGSTARS AND GUITAR HEROES

BY MATT VELLA ILLUSTRATIONS BY ADHEMAS BATISTA



were merely friends with benefits. EA Sports' *Madden NFL*—series soundtrack helped launch acts like Avenged Sevenfold. The *Grand Theft Auto* franchise promoted CD box sets full of its hiply curated soundtracks. Then Web-ready consoles like the PlayStation3, Xbox 360 and Wii made buying music through games a reality. *Guitar Hero III* and *Rock Band* first proved there could be a profound relationship between music-industry execs and game developers—the serious-money-making, industry-shifting kind.

Like big music retailers, both games steadily added new content and promoted music and major events each month. In March, for example, *Rock Band* offered downloads of Black Tide, Paramore and Serj Tankian tracks to coincide with performances at the South by Southwest festival. Its built-in store has grown from 15 songs to more than 200 and is well on its way to a promised catalogue of

hundreds more by year-end. A la carte downloads start at 99 cents; albums go for as much as \$14.99. *GH III*, meanwhile, offers some tracks as singles for about \$2.50 and others in bundles of three for \$6.25. Since they were released last fall, the two mega-titles have sold a combined 25 million track downloads (worth tens of millions of dollars) via their built-in music-download services.

Guitar Hero: World Tour, due out this fall, turns music playing—and buying—into a group affair, adding drums and a mic to the action. It will feature an in-game studio that lets players record their own songs on their faux instruments and then share them with other virtual rockers online; players will be able to download and rate them. User-generated tracks won't go on sale at first, but the game's developers are curiously tight-lipped about the possibility. (Imagine *Guitar Hero* plus the star-making potential of YouTube.)

Then there's *SingStar*, Sony's new title for the PS3. On the surface, it's a nifty way for karaoke fiends to belt out favorites by everyone from Britney Spears to Twisted Sister while sparing themselves the indignity of stumbling home drunk. It borrows heavily from YouTube, too, allowing players equipped with the PS3's Eye camera accessory to record videos of their

ON APRIL 15, L.A. miscreants Mötley Crüe put their new album's title track, "Saints of Los Angeles," on *Rock Band* for sale as a download. In one week, players snapped up 47,000 copies of the song for the Xbox 360 alone. iTunes users, by comparison, bought a measly 10,000 copies of the track, according to SoundScan.

For the Crüe, selling rock through *Rock Band* was just what Dr. Feelgood ordered. Now the same prescription—with a heavy dose of social networking—might even help the music and gaming industries find *their* next fortunes.

Just a couple of years ago, games and music

superstar turns and upload the clips to My SingStar Online. The site's 140,000 registered users have already generated 20,000 videos that have been watched more than 2.5 million times. Viewers can then rate the videos, which are predictably hilarious. Going by the handle "netcasty," one diminutive Asian man from Germany has posted dozens of videos of himself caterwauling to hits by Scissor Sisters and the Cardigans, earning four- and five-star ratings from fellow SingStars.

The game's major innovation, though, is the bundled SingStore—it's iTunes for the Facebook and Flickr generation. It looks and works like Apple's application but doesn't require users to leave the *SingStar* action when they want to buy a new song. Players who think they can out-sizzle "netcasty," for example, can download Scissor Sisters and then begin sashaying without ever missing a heavily scrutinized note. The SingStore has sold about 1 million songs since last fall, when the game debuted in Europe and Asia. One of the top hits so far: "Total Eclipse of the Heart," by Bonnie Tyler.

Injecting song-buying into game-playing is music to the ears of record-label execs. "Gamers' dollars have gone into games, and they're downloading music through other sources," says George White, senior vice

president of strategy and product development at Warner Music Group. But titles like *Rock Band* make music-buying essential. For example, if four players want to jam together online on a song that's not shipped with *Rock Band*, all must have purchased the track. Piracy is virtually impossible, too—Morpheus himself would have a hard time ripping playable music from his console. "It's a really exciting direction for games and an exciting new channel for music," White says. "The social aspect is going to help it grow much more quickly and make it much more meaningful to the people who are doing it."

The trend has even extended beyond games for wannabes waiting into USB mics or virtual shredders fingering plastic guitar buttons. In Rockstar Games' crimelands blockbuster *Grand Theft Auto IV*, players can earmark songs heard on in-game radios by dialing ZIT-555-0100 on the main character's digital cell phone. If a gamer is registered on Rockstar's Social Club Web site, he gets a message on the site with a link to Amazon.com, where he can buy the track for 99 cents. And unlike songs or albums downloaded via *Guitar Hero*, *Rock Band* and *SingStar*, the tunes on *GTA IV* can be dropped onto a portable MP3 player or burned onto a CD. (The labels get their usual cut from downloaded tracks; Rockstar gets a referral fee.)

Rockstar Games music supervisor Ivan Pavlovich says the idea grew out of labels' hunger for gaming partnerships: "They would constantly be asking us about additional streams of revenue, so we came up with a way to make them functional and incorporated them into the game play. When we decided to start the social club, it was just a really easy fit."

For *GTA IV*, Rockstar considered the idea of allowing Xbox 360 users to download tunes wirelessly to a Zune but eventually scrapped the concept for fear it would be too complex. Still, it was a glimpse at what will be the all-inclusive, portable, sharing-playing-buying experience of the future. "Going to another site to purchase music doesn't make any sense," says Terry McBride, the CEO of Nettwerk One Music, a label that represents Avril Lavigne and Sarah McLachlan, among others. Neither do the limitations keeping downloaded songs locked in their respective consoles, he says. "The barriers have to go."





MADDEN MADNESS

TWO DECADES AGO, ELECTRONIC ARTS UNVEILED A NOW-PRIMITIVE FOOTBALL GAME FOR THE APPLE II COMPUTER. SEVENTY MILLION COPIES AND COUNTLESS WASTED DORM-ROOM HOURS LATER, THE MADDEN FRANCHISE HAS BECOME AS MUCH A PART OF PIGSKIN CULTURE AS BEER AND OVERPRODUCED HALFTIME SHOWS. HERE'S OUR GUIDE TO THE '09 EDITION—AND A LOOK BACK AT MADDEN'S GREATEST HITS

BY ROBERT LEVINE

THIS YEAR'S MADDEN

NEWBIES WILL LIKE THE '09 EDITION FOR ITS BRAND-NEW TUTORIAL AND THE WAY THE GAME ADAPTS TO A PLAYER'S SKILL LEVEL. VETERANS WILL APPRECIATE THE GAME MAKERS' EFFORTS TO IMPROVE THE WAY THE ON-SCREEN ATHLETES LOOK AND MOVE.

FACE



Virtual

Actual

Every year, EA has a 3-D scanning company go to the Pro Bowl with a camera that takes images of players' faces by rotating around them as they sit in a chair. The process captures the topology of the face, which the game designers virtually add on to a generic model they lovingly call the "base head." The major players who don't sit for photos are digitally drawn.

HAIR

In the '09 version, *Madden* players have coifs that bounce and behave like the real thing for the first time: "Animating hair became necessary after some top players made news because of their hair," says art director Mike Young, who attended the game where Pittsburgh Steelers safety **Troy Polamalu** was tackled by his long locks.



UNIFORM

Madden producers scanned anonymous athletes (see Body) wearing pads, so their uniforms fit realistically. "You see the pads under the clothes, as well as how the clothes bunch up near them," Young says. "In the past, that was done by hand. We have great artists, but there's a limit to what you can do that way."

New England Patriots wide receiver Randy Moss.

2008



2008 season
Madden NFL 09
He's retired, so ex-Packer **Brett Favre** could become the second curse-dodger. "I hope he doesn't slip in the shower," says executive producer Dale Jackson.



2007 season
Madden NFL 08
Titans quarterback **Vince Young** misses one game due to a quadriceps injury. But he breaks the curse's hold and leads his team to the playoffs.



2006 season
Madden NFL 07
In the third game of the season, Seattle Seahawks running back **Shaun Alexander** fractures his left foot and misses six games.



PLATFORM: Xbox 360

2007
Madden NFL 08 lets real-life stars shine brighter in-game by making them hit harder or run faster than anyone else on the field. Virtual stars demand more money.



2005 season
Madden NFL 06
Philadelphia Eagles quarterback **Donovan McNabb** suffers a sports hernia, plays through the pain, then undergoes surgery.

THE EVOLUTION OF MADDEN

MADDEN HAS GONE FROM AN ARCADE-STYLE GAME FOR THE APPLE II COMPUTER (THE PRECURSOR TO THE MAC) TO A COMPLEX FOOTBALL SIM THAT LETS GAMERS PLAY ENTIRE SEASONS ONLINE. HERE'S HOW MADDEN HAS MOVED THE BALL DOWN THE FIELD SINCE 1989, IN TERMS OF GAME PLAY AND GRAPHICS. BONUS: A GUIDE TO THE EERIE "MADDEN CURSE!"

GRAPHICS

Madden's pixel progress: from blocky blockers to photo-realistic receivers

GAME PLAY

Madden has its roots in a football computer sim that CBS broadcaster John Madden helped develop after retiring from coaching in 1979.

1989

EA partners with Madden to release *John Madden Football* for the Apple II. Madden insists that the game have 11 players a side, which taxes the technology of the time.



PLATFORM: Apple II

HELMET

Helmets no longer reflect generic images of the stands, as they did in the past. The software now calculates which part of each stadium reflects off the helmet's surface based on the position of the player and the sun. "Not everyone notices," Young says. "But it's the kind of detail some people really like."

BODY

The producers took 3-D images of four anonymous athletes to get different body types on which to base players. (This is separate from the motion-capture process, in which sensors are attached to amateur players to make animations realistic.) Then the adjustments start: "We make tweaks, especially for the popular guys," Young says.



SOUNDTRACK

"You're preparing the music for a game that comes out in August between January and April," says Steve Schnur, EA's worldwide executive of music and marketing. "So we have to figure out where hip-hop is going, where rock is going and who will have an impact." This year, that meant getting the All-American Rejects, Gym Class Heroes and Busta Rhymes to finish songs that only existed as demos in time for inclusion in the game.



"RIM LIGHTS"

The sun and stadium lights now cast "rim light" that hits the borders of people and objects to outline them against the field and sky. "We wanted to make the characters the stars and separate them from the background so people can see the details better," Young says. He studied dance-performance lighting to figure out how to heighten the drama.



TRAINING CENTER

To make things easier for newbies, there's the Virtual Training Center, a playable tutorial that looks like a cross between *Tron* and the Holodeck on *Star Trek*. The training center rates players' abilities on passing, running and defense, then adjusts the game for them by, say, making it easier for players who are weaker on defense to block passes.



2003 season
Madden NFL 2004
Less than a week after the game's release, Atlanta Falcons QB (and future enemy of dog lovers everywhere) **Michael Vick** fractures his right fibula.



2002 season
Madden NFL 2003
After four consecutive 2,000-yard seasons, St. Louis Rams running back **Marshall Faulk** sprains his right ankle. His yard total nose-dives.



PLATFORM: PlayStation 2

THE CURSE

Madden started featuring NFL stars on the cover in 2000. Since then, all of them have gotten hurt soon after appearing on the box. Spooky!

1998

EA introduces "franchise mode," which lets gamers trade, draft and release players, making **Madden NFL '99** the first game that's more complicated than the sport it's based on.

2004
In **Madden NFL 2005**, players control defense with a "hit stick" (the right joystick). Also new: the Playmaker System, which lets gamers set up blitzes and other moves.

2002
Madden introduces EA Trax, which lets gamers choose background songs from a menu that includes Good Charlotte, OK Go and Andrew W.K. Party hard!



2000, 2001 seasons
Madden NFL 2001
The first cover star, Tennessee Titans running back **Eddie George**, fares well in the 2000 season but is hobbled by a toe injury the next year.

2000
Madden 2001 comes out for the PS2, with on-screen players who resemble their real-life counterparts and artificial intelligence that makes the computer a formidable opponent.



PLATFORM: Sony PlayStation

1990
John Madden Football debuts, on the Sega Genesis console. It's the first pigskin title that offers a 3-D field, as opposed to a flat, top-down view.



PLATFORM: Super Nintendo

1991
Viewers of ESPN and the Weather Channel alike rejoice as **John Madden Football '92** incorporates rain and snow in the version available for the Sega Genesis.

1993
EA gets an NFL license and gives the game real team names and logos. This iteration also introduces full-season play; national productivity plummets.



PLATFORM: Sega Genesis

1996
Released on Sony's PlayStation and Sega's Saturn, **Madden NFL '97** features 3-D graphics and player movement based on early motion-capture technology.

NIPMUC REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL // UPTON, MASSACHUSETTS > LEVEL 1

Joe Perry: "This was where we had our first gig, in 1970, using the name Aerosmith—it was the name nobody didn't like. We played a lot of suburban high schools; it gave us more freedom than playing clubs."

Tom Hamilton: "The students got out there and jumped and danced, and it was a rockin' time. I'm looking forward to [current] Nipmuc students finding out that their school is one of the venues. Watch, they'll probably sue us for a cut of the game."

MAX'S KANSAS CITY // NEW YORK > LEVEL 2

Perry: "Max's was a pretty decadent scene; there were plenty of drugs floating around. We were the hicks from Boston—we weren't wearing tutus or high heels, like the New York Dolls. Clive Davis, who was then president of Columbia Records, saw us there in 1972 and said, 'I'm gonna make you guys stars.'"

AERO SPACES

THE NEW
**GUITAR HERO:
AEROSMITH**
RE-CREATES SIX
STAGES THE BAND
HAS ROCKED IN
REAL LIFE. HERE,
GUITARIST
JOE PERRY AND
BASSIST
TOM HAMILTON
SHARE TALES FROM
EACH VENUE

BY MARK YARM

SUPER BOWL XXXV HALFTIME SHOW // TAMPA, FLORIDA > LEVEL 4

Hamilton: "When our fans heard we'd be playing with Britney Spears, some panicked that we were about to become her backup band. The show [2001] was a novelty, because it was a sporting event, and when we formed, sports guys were the ones who beat guys like us up. They only came around when they saw how much pussy was going on at our shows."

ROCK AND ROLL HALL OF FAME INDUCTION // NEW YORK (REAL LIFE); CLEVELAND (IN GAME) > LEVEL 6

Perry: "That was one of those gigs [in 2001] where you pinch yourself and go, *I can't believe we're here*. I felt nervous onstage."

Hamilton: "I was cynical about it at first. Finally, I had the proper emotional response, which was to be humbled and to enjoy it. At the [all-star-jam finale], Keith Richards was onstage, and he turned around and faced me with a big smile on his face. That made my millennium." [BLENDER]

ORPHEUM THEATRE // BOSTON > LEVEL 3

Perry: "We started playing at the Orpheum around '73 or '74. We'd play, then we'd go party at friends' apartments. Drugs were around, but it wasn't too crazy—nobody had much money back then."

Hamilton: "Our most poignant gig there was in 1984, after we'd been broken in half for three years. The band was onstage with our two new guitar players, and [guitarist] Brad [Whitford] and Joe were there watching. Afterward, we had a massive hotel party and started putting the band back together!"



REAL ORPHEUM



VIRTUAL ORPHEUM



STEVEN TYLER IN MOSCOW, 2007: "HEY, WHAT'S THIS OPEN LIGHT SOCKET DOING HEEEEER-R-R-RE?!"

OLYMPIYSKY ARENA // MOSCOW > LEVEL 5

Perry: "We played Russia for the first time in 2007. It was incredible performing for 60,000 people, but it wasn't just that. It was amazing being there, because we come from a generation where you couldn't go to Russia—it was verboten."

Hamilton: "We were Cold War kids, so I was like, *Holy crap, we're in Russia!* The venue was this bizarre, gigantic indoor stadium—a Stalin-era kind of building that was supposed to demonstrate the glory of the State. Russia was really cool. I had a lot of caviar there."



ACTUAL PERRY IN ACTUAL MOSCOW, 2007



VIRTUAL PERRY IN VIRTUAL MOSCOW, 2008



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THE ROUGH GUIDE TO CONOR OBERST

HOW TO BE AN INDIE-ROCK PRINCE FOR PENNIES A DAY!

HIGHTAILING IT DOWN TO MEXICO, THE BRIGHT EYES SINGER RECORDED HIS NEW ALBUM IN A

STUDIO CUT INTO A MOUNTAIN WHILE LIVING COMMUNE-STYLE WITH HIS BAND

BY JON DOLAN PHOTOGRAPHS BY JAKE CHESSUM



Man, Lloyd Christmas got emo!

HE'S SIX FEET

tall, 3,000 years old and weighs about 15 tons. He does not look entirely pleased.

When the Olmec people of ancient Mexico were carving massive basalt images of their warrior kings, they didn't scribble on the terrifying details—unforgiving walnut eyes, fearsome downturned mouths, pouty-tyrant-way-past-his-bedtime chins. The beast in front of us looks ready to rise up at any moment and chomp poor 110-pound Conor Oberst like a Fruit Roll-Up.

But the 28-year-old singer-songwriter stands his ground. "Hmm," he says, sizing things up. "One of the oldest and largest of the giant stone heads." Oberst and his band Bright Eyes went on tour in 2004 promoting the presidential candidacy of John Kerry, so he knows a thing or two about giant stone heads. This guy, however, is in another league—a real *look on my works, ye mighties, and despair* kind of customer. It's enough to get a young man thinking old-man thoughts, about life and death and legacies. Or maybe not: "That's awesome."

The slight, sweet son of Omaha, Nebraska, is walking the hushed halls of the Mexican and Central American wing of the American Museum of Natural History on Manhattan's Upper West Side, wide-eyed amid the jade jaguar statues and Mayan weaponry. He didn't come here on this rainy Friday afternoon just because his shoes were getting wet and he couldn't find a good anarchist bookstore to dry off in. The indie-rock bard is positively loco for all things related to our neighbor to the south. He recorded his new solo album, *Conor Oberst*, at a makeshift studio set up in a mountain villa called Valle Místico, near Tepoztlán, a small city almost two hours outside of Mexico City, known for its Aztec pyramids and frequent UFO sightings. If it weren't for all that Mexico City smog, he'd think about relocating permanently.

His wanderlust runs deep. In the past year or so Oberst has been outward-bounding all over the place—from Nashville to the Moab desert to Malibu, California, to Idaho, where he went rafting on the Lower Salmon River ("the most outdoorsy thing I've ever done"). There's something Huck Finn expansive and Bob

Dylan chameleonic about Oberst's travels—he's finding himself by losing himself: "I don't want to live in a box. I'd like to never have any idea what a box is. I know some people who haven't seen one in 20 years. That's really cool, to be so ... unconfined."

Oberst can get away with that kind of talk without sounding like a stoner. He's part *hey, whatever* '90s indie-rock, part questing '70s singer-songwriter, with a taciturn aspect and a drift high-plains drawl, like the withdrawn, spacey roommate in a Richard Linklater movie. He's wearing a wide-brimmed black hat (his "rain hat") that's practically a canopy over his slight frame, giving off a dark-sider frontiersman vibe.

He walks over to a full-wall Aztec calendar and points to the watchful visage at its center. "I think this is like the mouth that eats the world," he says. He then pushes aside the sunglasses dangling in front of his gray sweater to reveal a medallion-size version of the same ancient artifact.

The notion of Bright Eyes plunging into the mouth that eats the world is definitely not in keeping with what most people assume to be the Bright Eyes way. For a little less than a decade, Oberst has dealt with being regarded by fans and detractors alike as the preeminent beautiful worrier in hipster rock, an ascending "voice of a generation" (or at least its shut-in subset) since 2002's folk-rock orgy of emotional tumult and dislocation, *Lifted or The Story Is in the Soil, Keep Your Ear to the Ground*, hoisted him out of the Omaha music scene he'd helped spawn and into the national spotlight.

He was a new thing under the sun: an indie-rock heartthrob. His voice quavered with reams of angst and torrid desire, like SOS messages floated across a stormy ocean on torn tissue paper. His raven eyes peered out from behind a flop of even raven-new-wave hair. He was so thin, it looked like a strong wind might blow him into the next ZIP code. Someone needed to feed this poor boy a bowl of soup—stat. And tens of thousands of over-read, vitamin D-deficient waif babes would've ripped one another's Q-tip arms out to administer the first spoonful.

Not such a crappy situation for an anxious 22-year-old to find himself in, assuming you know how to work it. But in the hallowed tradition of just about every "voice of a generation" before him, Oberst wasn't all that stoked with the media myth that encircled him, even if he's way too Midwestern *aw shucks* humble to make a big stink about it.

And there was plenty to make a stink about. In 2005, satiric weekly newspaper *The Onion* ran a story headlined, NATION PLANNING SURPRISE PARTY TO CHEER UP CONOR OBERST. In 2007, *Radar* posted a less amusing humor piece on its Web site, a tongue-in-cheek rant blaming Bright Eyes' songs of isolation and anger for a shooting spree in an Omaha mall that claimed nine lives—a la Marilyn Manson and Columbine.

Then there was his rumored romance with alt-rock's favorite home wrecker, Winona Ryder. Suddenly, a guy who got his start doing teenage punk-rock van tours and saving up summer-job money to put out records was a tabloid target.

"I don't ever think about it," he says of *l'affaire* Winona and its attendant peril. Then he sighs with vague annoyance before recovering his sanguine self.

"But I will tell you a story. We played *The Tonight Show* last fall and went across the street to this Mexican restaurant. The place was swarming with cameras. Britney Spears was eating in the other side of the restaurant. The way people treated her was the saddest, most disgusting thing I've ever seen. It was like the Elephant Man, like the circus. I couldn't shake it for a couple of days. I'd never want to be near that kind of celebrity."

IT'S A FEW HOURS after closing time at the museum, and Oberst is sitting at the bar of an upscale Mexican restaurant off Central Park West, drinking a Negra Modelo and talking about when he decided his own act at the margins of the pop-culture freak >>



"Brick wall, talking to you is like talking to a brick wall."



08:16:49



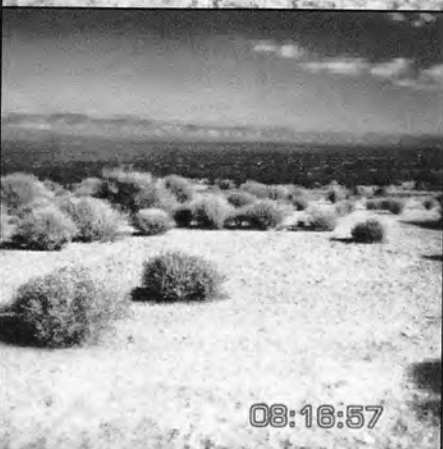
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08:17:01



08:17:03



08:17:05



08:17:07



08:17:09



08:17:11

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show was getting tiresome.

In 2005, Bright Eyes released two albums at the same time, the electronic-rock *Digital Ash in a Digital Urn* and the folky *I'm Wide Awake, It's Morning*. His avid cult scooped up enough copies of the singles from each record, "Lua" and "Take It Easy (Love Nothing)," to lodge them at the No. 1 and 2 spots on the *Billboard* Hot 100 Singles sales chart. Bright Eyes mania was at its peak. But after the year of constant touring that followed, Oberst "wasn't dealing well," he says. "I wasn't really feeling comfortable in my own skin, able to concentrate on things."

That was the moment the Conor Oberst Journey of Personal Discovery commenced in earnest. In early 2006, he took a couple of long trips to the Cassadaga Spiritualist Camp in Florida, also known as "the psychic center of the world." He got a reading, soaked in some mysticism, grew his hair—and cleansed: "The main reading, I was in there with this woman for two or three hours. She told me, 'You think you're on the wrong path, but if you stick to what you're doing, things will work out.' It might not sound all that 'psychic,' but I think the point is that I believed her."

The next Bright Eyes album, 2007's *Cassadaga*, was a searing spiritual colonic. It had a song about rehab (not Oberst's), another about an abortion, one that some read as a Ryder kiss-off and one about a musician "turning tricks" instead of making art. Its high point was "Four Winds," an astonishingly great fever spiel about religion, politics and the apocalypse, unfolding under the watchful eyes of a spray-painted portrait of a Mexican girl. "Well, I went back by rented Cadillac and company jet!" he near-shouts. "Like a newly orphaned refugee, retracing my steps/All the way to Cassadaga to commune with the dead/They said, 'You'd better look alive.'"

Staying alive meant staying in motion. Oberst can't abide being in the same town for more than three months; the result, no doubt, of touring since he was a teenager. He keeps an apartment in New York, records in Omaha and doesn't think of either as home. In Tepoztlán, he and his ad hoc group of musicians—the Mystic Valley Band—enjoyed a dorm-style communalism. They slept in a cluster of small houses tucked into a mountainside. They ate in a shared outdoor kitchen, went on hikes, watched the sun set and generally lived off the grid. "It was off in its own universe," Oberst says. "Since there weren't really hours to the day and no one had to leave, we could operate at a natural pace."

What's most interesting about Oberst's escapism is that, at heart, it isn't all that escapist. His border crossing allowed him to get a new perspective on American politics, specifically the immigration debates that have been roiling Midwestern cities like his hometown. Being out of the U.S. only deepened his commitment to "what America's about—inclusiveness, diversity, the idea that we're better than the sum of our parts. This idea of building a wall, it really saddens me."

Conor Oberst is the first album he's made under his own name since a series of cassettes he self-released during his early-'90s puberty ("back when all the songs were about video games"). The decision to go solo, as it were, might seem odd to the people who've always assumed that Bright Eyes was merely a recording guise—the way Chris Carrabba is Dashboard Confessional. And it may seem odd because Oberst dispelled just



CONOR ON THE COUCH

Psychologists mine seven years of Bright Eyes lyrics for clues

The professionals:

Margaret Clark, Ph.D., Yale psych professor, social psychologist
Cooper Lawrence, developmental-psych expert, radio host

"MIRRORS & FEVERS," 2001

"I was cold in a dream/Somewhere close to the surface/Between the ice and the stream"

Clark: "There are new studies that reveal that literal coldness is a cue to coldness in relationships."

Lawrence: "A perfect example of how you shouldn't write songs when sick. Put the guitar down, get some rest—and remember: lots of fluids!"

"THE VANISHING ACT," 2006

"So I fill my gut with that dark red wine until my brain shuts off and my eyes go blind"

Clark: "Darkness and lack of sun are signs of gloom and depression."

Lawrence: "Sounds like alcohol poisoning; might want to get to the hospital ASAP."

"MILK THISTLE," 2008

"Milk thistle, milk thistle/Let me down slow/Help me go slow/I've been carrying on"

Lawrence: "Taking herbs to get rid of toxins shows his life has meaning. He's come a long way from songs about cheap booze and shoelaces."

that notion by officially declaring Bright Eyes a band in 2007.

"There's something nice about starting from scratch," he says.

That line could be his mantra.

Bright Eyes has always mutated to fit Oberst's momentary needs. *Lifted* credited 22 musicians, a five-member drum corps, a seven-member choir, a four-member "country choir" and a "drunk choir," consisting of "everyone that was drinking at Duffy's and O'Rourke's that night." On *Digital Ash*, he was backed by Omaha eyeliner-new-wave revivalists the Faint. On *Wide Awake* it was a spare-folk band that included guest vocals from country-rock great Emmylou Harris. The only constant is 34-year-old Mike Mogis, who has served as musical director for Oberst's Mobius-strip creative style.

"My role is pretty amorphous," says Mogis, who didn't make the trip south (*Conor Oberst* is also Oberst's debut as producer). "Sometimes he plays me something and I build around it. Other times he has a more defined idea of what he wants. He might come in with an acoustic song, and pretty soon it's turned into a dance-rock song. This time he wanted to make a record by himself, to see what it's like having complete control."

An Oberst song might begin when a melody or some chords or a line from Yeats or the Bible pops into his head, maybe in the shower or while reading. Over the years, his songwriting has become more focused. Early Bright Eyes albums were first thought/best thought introspective outpourings. These days, he revises and tightens, and he's more interested in impressionistic-image tangles than heart-rending autobiographical directness.

"Every line doesn't have to be understood by everyone," he says. "I absorb things, and they kind of emerge. That's how I find inspiration. Something affects you, but it takes a while to work into your subconscious and come back out through that weird creative process."

In other words, this incredibly prolific songwriter—who has basically recorded an album a year since he stopped needing a babysitter—is nearing his 30s with time to burn. He's waited until he's more than 14 albums into his career to release a self-titled solo CD—the kind of indulgence few artists get in an era where careers rise and fall like market bubbles. One of the tags Bright Eyes got saddled with in the early '00s was "new Dylan," despite the fact that, as Oberst notes, "it sounds nothing like that." Yet, like Dylan—maybe the only rock artist whose output will definitely be around as long as those colossal heads—Oberst works on his own cosmic schedule.

This is what he sings about on *Conor Oberst*. It's a dusty folk-rock album about the mystic power of travel and restlessness—he watches red rockets glare over Cape Canaveral, has sex in a moving van, contemplates surfers on golden beaches and makes pit stops in New York; Moab, Utah; and Sausalito, California. One song, "Valle Místico," is just someone blowing a horn.

"Victory's sweet even deep in the cheap seats," he sings, using displacement and distance to find community, not sink into isolation. It's a vision anyone who has ever turned an ignition key can get into. Literally, anyone.

"I love freedom," he says, chuckling. "I guess that's one thing George Bush and I have in common." [BLENDER]



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THE COOL KIDS

These nerds with attitude joyously rhyme about BMX bikes, sneakers and video games—without veering into joke-rap territory.



★★★★



DAVID BOWIE

Listen as the leper messiah converts L.A. innocents to his space-cult on this spectacular live recording from the '72 Ziggy Stardust Tour.



★★★★★



LOS LONELY BOYS

The Chicano blues-rock trio puts out an album of songs about marital fidelity and ... sorry, we fell asleep for a second there.



★★

THE GUIDE

THEY MAKE 'EM. WE REVIEW 'EM.

MAKE IT WAYNE

RAP'S REIGNING EXTRATERRESTRIAL PUTS THE MIX-TAPE DELUGE ON PAUSE TO DROP HIS STRANGEST, MOST EXHILARATING ALBUM YET

BY JONAH WEINER



Lil Wayne shills for Crest Bling Strips.

LIL WAYNE THA CARTER III ★★★★★ 1/2 YOUNG MONEY/CASH MONEY/UNIVERSAL

FOR A WHILE, it seemed Lil Wayne might never put out another album—what was the point? After his last LP, 2005's *Tha Carter II*, the New Orleans MC struck upon a music-distribution model so radical it made Radiohead look like Thomas Edison shipping wax cylinders by Pony Express. Step 1: Rap about whatever pops into your head, over any beat you please—copyright laws be damned. Step 2: Flood the Internet with material, compiled on mix tapes or leaked a la carte. Step 3: Say yes to anyone who invites you to guest star on a track (*anyone*, meaning Enrique Iglesias and Gym Class Heroes). Step 4: Repeat at an inhuman clip, not merely keeping pace with the relentless blog cycle—in which MP3s ping from studios to iPods to trash cans in a matter of days—but leaving the blog cycle facedown on the racetrack, turf in its teeth, gasping for air.

The idea of a Lil Wayne album now seems both outdated and unequal to his accomplishments. How can a 70-minute CD be anything but arbitrary and incomplete next to the gigabytes of heat he's been dropping? Wayne has atomized the definition of a discography, and for him, there's no going back. By the standards of a guy who declared himself the greatest rapper alive and then—even more audaciously—proved it, *Tha Carter III* can't help but be a bit disappointing. By any lesser yardstick, it's a weird, gripping triumph—and all but a lock for hip-hop album of the year.

When we talk about great rappers, we talk about where they're from. Biggie is unthinkable without Bed-Stuy. Ask your mom where Tupac laid his head, and chances are good she'll throw a Westside hand sign. But for Lil Wayne, home doesn't really exist. He grew up in New Orleans, but that was before Katrina flushed

away his schools, his friends and his stomping grounds. Now he splits his time between Miami, Atlanta, his tour bus and—in a claim that only becomes more plausible the more music he releases—Mars. In a genre dominated by area-code-chanting provincialists, he's a refugee, a nomad, a resident space alien. This is the secret to Wayne's 21st-century success, the way he went from funny-voiced Dirty South novelty to the virtuoso Jay-Z anointed "my heir." Even as he lamented the destruction of his hometown, his style became unfettered. His taste in beats and sounds is omnivorous, his crushed-charcoal rasp equally indebted to crisp East Coast complexity, Southern sing-song and his own warped imagination.

On *Tha Carter III*, his brain operates at Googley hundred miles an hour, whipping from one bizarre tangent (Dennis Rodman, the Clapper, Beetlejuice) to the next (oral sex, toenail polish, doctors' inscrutable handwriting) so rapidly that his rhymes practically double as hypertext links. He likes to have fun—he exults in his own abilities like Tiger Woods bouncing a golf ball on his club 100 times for the hell of it. There's an exhilarating, disorienting sense of freedom to the album, the rush of rules being ignored. "A Milli" is nothing but punch line after punch line, with no time for a chorus. "Lollipop" is nothing but chorus, sung giddily through a droidish Auto-Tune effect, and the result treads the line between gimmicky and avant-garde. On "Dr. Carter," Wayne raps as a physician

trying to revive wack MCs, a metaphor he extends for three hilarious, goofy verses, and on "Phone Home," he steals his hook and his timbre from E.T., croaking about eating rappers he bought at the supermarket—he can't decide whether he wants to save hip-hop or devour it. And on the smoldering "Shoot Me Down," he announces, "I'm drinking hot tea, bitch." Any thug can brag about guns and bubbly. How badass is a Celestial Seasonings shout-out?

That's his coup: Wayne is a mutant gangsta, messing with what the word means and proving better than anyone since Biggie that the role can reveal more about the soul than most practitioners let on. Where Jay-Z and 50 Cent tout their ruthless efficiency and their focus, he embraces chaos, slapstick, intoxication and uncertainty. For Wayne, a gangsta is an id-unleashing beast. His voice ripples with cracks and growls and other disruptions, as though it's bucking under his control, and he lets his mind travel places both sillier and darker than gangstas usually tread. On "Playin' With Fire," addressing his mother, he sobbingly recounts an adolescent Oedipal showdown: "Remember when your pussy second husband tried to beat ya?/Remember when I went into the kitchen, got the cleaver?/He ain't give a fuck, I ain't give a fuck neither." Even without a blood-spattering climax, it's harrowing—scarier than all the gunshots and death threats in the world.

DOWNLOAD "A Milli," "Let the Beat Build," "Mr. Carter"

WEEZY DOES IT

OF LIL WAYNE'S 4,417 MIX TAPES, THESE ARE THE THREE BEST



DEDICATION 2

(2006)

★★★★½

His black-market breakthrough. On the standout track "Sportscenter," he rhymes over a symphony of NASCAR engines and bouncing tennis balls, staging a thrilling game of one-on-one with himself: "I'm serving this track like Steffi Graf/Roger Federer, there's no competitors." Boom goes the dynamite!



DA DROUGHT 3

(2007)

★★★★½

This two-CD freestyle fest is Weezy at his virtuosic, beat-jacking best. The "We Takin' Over" remix climaxes with bursts of impressionistic violence capped off by a totally silly punch line: "Beef! Yes! Chest! Feet! Tag! Bag! Blood! Sheets! Yikes! Yeeeks! Great! Scott! Storch! Can I borrow your yacht?"



CARTER 3 SESSIONS

(2007)

★★★★

Outtakes that a lot of MCs would call their finest songs. The woozy drug trip "I Feel Like Dying" captures his weirdness as well as his swagger: "I'm sitting on the clouds, I got smoke coming from my seat/I can play basketball with the moon/I got the whole world at my feet." It ain't bragging if it's true. **JOSH EELLS**

**WE HAVE GOOD NEWS
AND BAD NEWS...**

THE AIRBORNE TOXIC EVENT THE AIRBORNE TOXIC EVENT

★★★

MAJORDOMO

When these L.A. indie rockers get dumped, they don't get mad—they get drunk

➤ Mikel Jollett's love life has a big problem: him. "I might be all right, I guess/If I wasn't such a mess," he confesses. On his band's debut, he describes the many ways he's no ideal mate: Candid tales of getting sloshed and drunk-dialing abound. As a lyricist, he always finds a telling detail to dramatize his romantic misadventures—the ceiling tiles that become his best friend, the dress that reminds him of her—but as a songwriter he often falls back on postpunk generalities (start-stop guitars accented by a vaguely danceable rhythm section). On the album's best moments, he pours his hopeless longing into sweaty, inebriated celebrations of love's boundless optimism. On "Innocence," a gorgeous viola intro gives way to ecstatic new-wave-ish keyboards, and the rousing "Sometime Around Midnight" makes late-night pining sound positively heroic. Jollett is a mess, but he's trying to be a beautiful one.

TIM GRIERSON

DOWNLOAD "Sometime Around Midnight," "Innocence"

DAVID BANNER

THE GREATEST STORY
EVER TOLD

★★½

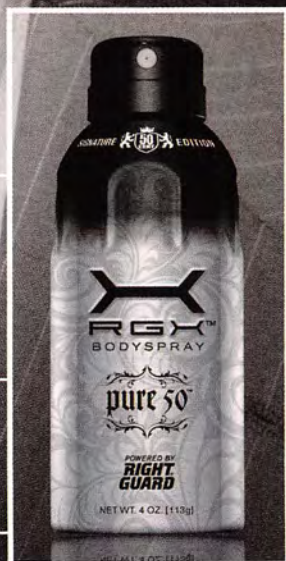
UNIVERSAL MOTOWN

Bipolar Southern madman exercises his constitutional right to make sex jams

➤ This Mississippi hothead defended the First Amendment at a congressional hearing on hip-hop last year, and on his fourth album he continues to take advantage of his right to free speech. "All you sorry-ass, broke-ass haters—suck a dick!" he barks. And that's just the intro. Banner is known for wild mood swings—fire-breathing antiauthoritarian one minute, bittersweet rap balladeer the next. But where he once aimed his lupine snarl and ear-chomping vitriol at high-profile targets (see: "Bush"), he now uses his overactive id to reinforce every rap stereotype imaginable. He and his guests

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APOCALYPSE WOW

L.A. FUNKATEER FRETS ABOUT WARHEADS
BY JON DOLAN

BECK MODERN GUILT ★★★½ DGC



EVER SINCE BECK declared himself the biggest loser of the '90s, even his bubbliest chocolate-in-my-peanut-butter whiteboy jams come with a grief-y aftertaste—he's like a disco duck with a closet full of funeral-black leisure suits. Album 10 is his most frightened since 2002's acoustic, self-strafting *Sea Change*, and one of his most gripping. Produced by hip-hop head case Danger Mouse, who is half of Gnarl Barkley, *Modern Guilt* mixes ancient rock—mainly the incense-and-peppermints-flavored '60s psychedelia of *Revolver*-era Beatles, the Zombies and Pink Floyd—with the woozy, abstract beats Danger Mouse manages to turn into freaked-out fun. The results: a very good very bad trip.

Beck and Danger Mouse were destined to be together. The Mouse can't go out in public without dressing up like the Tin Man or a Jedi Knight. Beck recently toured with a band of puppets doing his songs. Spaced-out music that helped a generation of love-bead farmers locate their inner tree elf is good glue for these oddballs. Yet dappled escapism isn't their goal. The last Beck album, *The Information*, warned us that iPhones weren't making the world any more connected. Here, mind-altering sounds spelunk into a modernity where the ice caps are melting and people need teleprompters to say hello. On "Walls," with hushed backing vocals from indie misery babe Cat Power, Beck mumbles about "warheads stacked in the kitchen" and "distraction like it's a religion" like he's about to pass out *THE END IS NIGH!* flyers in Griffith Park.

Danger Mouse dunks his terrified pal in a haze of orchestral ooze, echo-chamber piano plunks and skittery, floorless slo-mo grooves that are almost as disoriented as the wacked-out melodies. Even the bubblegum blast "Profanity Prayers" and the '70s glam-metal riff-crusher "Soul of a Man" are heartsick. "So many people/So many people ... Where do they go?" Beck asks on the interstellar odyssey "Chemtrails," evoking the Paul McCartney of "Eleanor Rigby," only less cute and way more high. The time for being cute went out with the spotted owl.

DOWNLOAD "Chemtrails," "Modern Guilt," "Profanity Prayers"

twist their dick-waving tropes with ridiculousness (Pimp C: "My nuts got a MySpace page"), but Banner's sleazefest "Hey Girls" is about as sexy as a panty-sniffing stalker. He tries to atone on the bluesy and somber "Cadillac on 22's Part 2," but—like much of this album—the sequel is a downgrade compared to its wrenching and confessional original.

RYAN DOMBAL

DOWNLOAD "Get Like Me"

BOBBY DIGITAL
DIGI SNACKS

★★★½
KOCH

Part Zorro, part Howard Stern: Rap superhero enlists Nordic power to soar above buildings

As crew leader of Wu-Tang Clan, RZA shrouded their batshit verses in hard-bitten, claustrophobic productions. When he's gone solo—releasing concept albums under his superhero alias, Bobby Digital—RZA has sussed near-mystical angst out of scratchy strings and Shaw Brothers kung fu dialogue. His two previous records were like comics drawn by stoned, horny Five Percenters. Bringing in backup on No. 3, he keeps the bizarro themes but ditches the cold, canned sounds. He still rhymes about edible panties and rocket launchers, but now Scandinavian singer Thea (on the hood jeremiad "Drama") and George Harrison's guitarist son Dhani ("You Can't Stop Me Now") add a lively, unexpected dash of soul. And with smoothly rollicking grooves, funk outfit Stone Mecca flood RZA's dark cities with light. Creatively cast, bonkers as ever—it's a bright spot in the Bobby Digital series.

ROQUE STREW

DOWNLOAD "Drama," "You Can't Stop Me Now"

I LOVE THIS CD!

MADONNA
HARD CANDY
WARNER BROS.

"She has been around for, like, a thousand years, and she is still trying new things. And how great does she look for her age? I'd date her."

TILA TEQUILA



CSS
DONKEY

★★★½
SUB POP

If this Brazilian punkstress had half the sex she sings about, she'd never have time to sing about all the sex she has

The singer is named Lovefoxxx, and the drummer cultivates a handlebar mustache the shape and size of a PlayStation controller—can you guess that CSS like their music cheap, fast and sleazy? Four-fifths female, these artfully disheveled punks from Brazil—land of the thong and the butt implant—push a national obsession with sex until it borders on parody. On their 2006 debut, they set cheeky tales of hipster boot-knocking and Paris Hilton lust to throbbing lo-fi beats. *Donkey* is harder rocking and occasionally more earnest—the roaring, Pixies-indebted "Rat Is Dead (Rage)" visits violent revenge upon an abusive boyfriend—and their ear for melody has developed (the pining "How I Became Paranoid"). But the overriding spirit is still goofy hedonism. "I'm gonna jump onto the

table and dance my ass off till I die," Lovefoxxx announces. With CSS, even biting the dust is a blast.

JONAH WEINER

DOWNLOAD "Rat Is Dead (Rage)," "Move"

CUTE IS WHAT WE AIM FOR
ROTATION

★★
FUELED BY RAMEN

Growing pains overtake youthful pleasures on steroid-injected emo follow-up

On their 2006 debut, this Buffalo, New York, quartet emphasized the pop in their power by offsetting hard emo guitars with singer-pinup Shaant Hacikyan's soft, nearly effete sigh. Here, they abandon the main attraction of Fueled by Ramen's most successful bands—their feminine side. John Feldmann of ska-punk holdouts Goldfinger shares songwriting credits on more than half the tunes and jacks up the dude factor with claustrophobically loud and unrelentingly slick production that squashes nuance with metal muscle. Dehumanized by software that perfects his pitch, an android Hacikyan shouts where in the past he would have coyly seduced. This insecure cad still volleys a few appealingly vulnerable admissions: The

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BLACK MAGIC

FLORIDA BAND TURNS '80S NEW WAVE INTO YOUNG-ADULT HEARTBREAK
BY ROB SHEFFIELD**BLACK KIDS** PARTIE TRAUMATIC ★★★½ COLUMBIABlack Kids:
"Who farted?"

WHEN YOU'RE A guy singing lines like, "You are the girl that I've been dreaming of/Ever since I was a little girl," you are going to get attention. Especially when you lead a twee band of Jacksonville, Florida, party people called Black Kids. Singer Reggie Youngblood is one of the two actual black kids in the band—the other is younger sister Ali on keyboards—and they got instant buzz with their glorious debut single, "I'm Not Gonna Teach Your Boyfriend How to Dance With You." Youngblood yelps a fragile crush note in his ridiculous Robert Smith falsetto over guitar jangle nicked from New Order and a vintage Eurodisco synth riff that sounds like it was played on a kazoo. No wonder it became last summer's indie-rock wedding song.

Black Kids' belated album—arriving a year after sleazy rock-club DJs put them in heavy rotation—relies on charm to get over, which takes a certain gall for a band that calls one of their best songs "I've Underestimated My Charm (Again)." Youngblood sings like the kind of Morrissey fan who gave up on girls until he actually met some. The sound is lightweight on principle—virtually every song takes Bow Wow Wow's cover of "I Want Candy" as a template. They even hired the London Suede's Bernard Butler to produce, all the better to seize their Britpop fantasies.

Youngblood's tunes are so clever it's easy to overlook the commitment to new wave it took for him to avoid wasting his love of wordplay on folk music. He can reference '90s rapper Positive K and '70s electronic jokesters Sparks in the same song without sounding like he's trying too hard, and the bubbly group vocals behind him do wonders for the wistful teen longings of "Hurricane Jane" and "Look at Me (When I Rock Wichoo)." It's silly to complain that the Kids got too famous too fast, because nothing in their music suggests maturity would do a thing for them, and who wants to hear them learn to play their instruments? Now's their time.

DOWNLOAD "I'm Not Gonna Teach Your Boyfriend How to Dance With You," "I Wanna Be Your Limousine"

single "Practice Makes Perfect" hangs its hook on "I've become what a mother wouldn't want in a son." But in trading teen precociousness for success-minded malleability, CIWWAF have compromised their cuteness.

BARRY WALTERS

DOWNLOAD "Practice Makes Perfect"**DR. DOG**

FATE

★★★½

PARK THE VAN

Warmhearted Philly psychonauts like their brew hopped-up

>> Dr. Dog are aptly named, because their scruffy psychedelic pop hops onto your lap like a puppy—frisky, desperate to be liked and pretty entertaining. They sprinkle their down-home mix of hook and harmony with doo-wop and jamboree, and their influences are as clear as good-day sunshine: the Beatles, the Beatles listening to the Beach Boys, the Band. But Dr. Dog never sound musty. Even as they take on the album title's potentially heavy theme, two vocalists sing with wide-open smiles, and they toss in new-wave beats alongside the saloon pianos and tube-amp guitars. On "100 Years" and "The Old Days," the lyrics address the same issues their music raises: earlier generations, nostalgia and change. "Pay it back, pay it forward" Scott McMicken sings on "Uncovering the Old,"

ASTONISHING FACT! DR. JOHN, whose mother was a model, got his first taste of show business as a child, when he appeared on an Ivory Soap box.

suggesting that even though your music may be rooted in the past, it can still help you face the future.

ERIK DAVIS

DOWNLOAD "The Breeze," "From"**DR. JOHN AND THE LOWER 911**

CITY THAT CARE FORGOT

★★★½

429

Conspiracy theories from the good-time voodoo pianist whose 1974 album first popularized the word *Bonnaroo*

>> In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, superdelectable New Orleans piano master Dr. John got something bigger than religion. He got sincerity, which sure beats the gentility he got in the '80s. Granted, it leaves him mouthing slogans like "Save our planet" while trying to convince the world what only an ignoramus would deny is possible: that the levees

were blown up on purpose by malign forces. Yet miraculously, the old reprobate almost brings off his protest album. Clarifying his notoriously incomprehensible drawl, he adduces environmental

depredations, insurance scams, contracting woes, refugees, suicides, flood-shocked minds and bodies in the ruined streets over darker and slower variations on the funk he's had under his thumb since he billed himself the Night Tripper 40 years ago. "If ya wonder how

Dr. Dog:
"When we said we wanted to do some rails, this isn't what we had in mind!"

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CD WE'RE TOTALLY GAY FOR



Seun Kuti's shirt is gr-r-reat!

SEUN KUTI & EGYPT 80

SEUN KUTI & EGYPT 80 ★★★½ DISORIENT

His brother hosts a radio station on *Grand Theft Auto IV*, but Seun fronts their dad's incomparable band

"I done see many things/I done hear many things," are the first words out of Seun Kuti's mouth, and he earns them. Born in 1983, the youngest son and clearest inheritor of Fela Kuti—whose funk-influenced, protest-possessed Nigerian Afrobeat is America's most imitated African pop style—is two decades younger than Fela's oldest son, the much smoother Afrobeat modernizer Femi. The teenage Seun (chay-'oon) fought successfully to take over Fela's Egypt80 band after his father died in 1997, and although his gruff baritone doesn't quite generate Fela's forthright oratorical momentum, that just means he's mortal. The vehemence of Seun's profane anger should convince anyone who knows the original that for him it's personal—and that he's learned his lessons well. And where his father got away with letting records run on, these seven-minute grooves are so focused you can tell they have something to prove.

ROBERT CHRISTGAU

DOWNLOAD "Don't Give That Shit to Me," "Fire Dance"

we doin'," he sings, "short version is, we gettin' mad." It suits him.

ROBERT CHRISTGAU

DOWNLOAD "My People Need a Second Line," "Say What?"**G UNIT**

T.O.S.—TERMINATE ON SIGHT

★★★

G UNIT/INTERSCOPE

Don't let the Vitamin Water fool you: 50 Cent & Co. are still some mean-ass dudes

➤ 50 Cent's crew approaches its second album like a *Fortune* 500 company facing down a recession. Sales—and street cred, that sovereign currency—are not quite what they used to

be, so G Unit try to keep their stock up with personnel shifts (Tennessee growler Young Buck, on only a few tracks here, is out; several upstart producers are in) and a return to the core values (coldheartedness, vindictiveness, evil) that made them stars in the first place. Gone are the candy shops, amusement parks and overall glossy sheen of 50's last two solo LPs—on this clamorous, relentless album, a violent death lurks in every bar ("Rider Pt. 2"), licentious catcalls have replaced slinky come-ons ("I Like the Way She Do It") and guns seem to fire off their own accord (every other

song here). In doses, it's rousing. Over the course of a whole album, it's exhausting.

TAL ROSENBERG

DOWNLOAD "Straight Outta Southside," "Piano Man"**THE HOLD STEADY**

STAY POSITIVE

★★★★½

VAGRANT

Brooklyn boozehounds hang around way past happy hour

➤ "In bar light, she looked all right; in daylight, she looked desperate." It's not the best line on an album full of great ones, but it might be the most instructive. The Hold Steady are masters at mining the beer-goggled gap between possibility and reality. Their fourth album kicks off with "Constructive Summer," a hopeful, pun-packed jam about building houses and scenes (and "getting hammered," natch), but the optimism is a feint—a setup for the hard-luck

punch lines that follow. *Stay Positive* is this great band's weakest album: Frontman Craig Finn, a blustery, braying raconteur with a soft spot for burnouts and suckers, has been sharper and funnier before, and their fast-and-down-the-middle rock has gotten more experimental (synths, harpsichords, talk boxes, what sounds like a theremin), which isn't the same as better. But it's still a pretty good way to spend 45 minutes. Especially in bar light.

JOSH EELLS

DOWNLOAD "Stay Positive," "Sequestered in Memphis"**KERLI**

LOVE IS DEAD

★★★

ISLAND DEF JAM

Look at it this way: Can you name us a better Estonian pop star?

➤ Though her CD cover resembles a Bratz doll restyled by Gerard Way—spooky landscape, mutilated teddy bear and *yes, she's crying actual metal tears*—there's plenty to admire in 21-year-old Estonian ice queen Kerli Kõiv's journey from former Communist citizen to putative starlet of the American dream. *Love Is Dead's* gothic gray walls of riff and throbbing drum machines are convincing enough, and Kerli has clearly lived a tough old life so far. Unfortunately, it translates into kohl-eyed pantomime, rather than cathartic music, with lyrics so hopelessly trite they sound like a feel-good tract for preschoolers (it would take a heart of stone to hear a

line like "Let the butterflies cry" without laughing). Sold as a new Björk, she's more of a monochrome Avril Lavigne and, as such, unlikely to stop your world on its axis.

ANDREW HARRISON

DOWNLOAD "Walking on Air"**LOS LONELY BOYS**

FORGIVEN

★★★

EPIC

Blues-rock Chicano brothers whose name is Spanglish for "the lonely boys"

➤ The Grammy winner "Heaven" vaulted this Texas-raised trio's amiably stodgy 2003 debut toward multiplatinum. The less-chart-busting 2006 follow-up was called *Sacred*; this one's *Forgiven*, and its penitent

but hopeful mood still suggests a Catholic equivalent of corporate Christian rock. For the first time, there are no Spanish-language song titles. The marital pledge "Staying With Me" dutifully approximates

"Heaven's" hint of Latin lilt under riffs echoing the Isley Brothers' metallic '70s soul, and Spencer Davis Group's reliably propulsive old macho groover "I'm a Man" makes for funky cover material. Guitarist Henry Garza gives that one some dense *wah-wah*; from blues wake-up calls to drowsier summer breezes, he's still the star here. But even his most agitated solos can't make these siblings' vague sentiments exciting.

CHUCK EDDY

DOWNLOAD "Staying With Me"**LOW VS. DIAMOND**

LOW VS. DIAMOND

★★★

EPIC

L.A.-based quintet still haven't found what they're looking for

➤ Low Vs. Diamond aim for U2-style testimony-rock that mainlines Big Themes like love, ✚

I LOVE THIS CD!

M.I.A.
KALA
XL/INTERSCOPE

"I like the mix of hip-hop and Middle Eastern beats. They use her song in the trailer for *Pineapple Express*, and it instantly makes that the coolest trailer on the planet."

EMMA STONE



BLENDER V.I.P.*

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AIN'T IT COOL?

RUN-DMC-LOVING, FRUITY PEBBLES-MUNCHING RAP NERDS MAKE GOOD

BY JONAH WEINER

THE COOL KIDS THE BAKE SALE ★★★★★

C.A.K.E./CHOCOLATE INDUSTRIES



The Cool Kids: Too cool for driving school, apparently.

MIKEY ROCKS AND CHUCK INGLISH hate the term “retro act,” but there’s no avoiding it: This EP is way 2007. The Cool Kids aren’t just beneficiaries but products of the Internet—they met on MySpace and their tracks broke on blogs—and nine of the ten songs compiled on *The Bake Sale* have already been munching up RapidShare bandwidth for half a year. Only in music’s up-is-down digital age can a debut CD double as a reissue.

But *The Bake Sale* is a throwback to an era even more ancient than last year: The Cool Kids love golden-age, late-’80s rap. They quote knowingly from N.W.A and Rakim, prefer sparse drum-machine clatter to melodies and wear clothes—Starter jackets, pinstriped Bulls caps, acid-wash jeans—that were last fashionable in the hood when a Clinton was actually set to succeed a Bush in the White House. Still, they aren’t finger-wagging nostalgists, convinced it was all better before you (or, for that matter, they) were born. They’re brats, irreverently flipping through the hip-hop canon, discarding anything they deem dusty and dated, cherry-picking what sounds hot.

The result is music that is excitingly in and out of time. The beats are minimalist marvels of negative space, a bit like the Neptunes covering Run-DMC on a budget, and the rhymes, delivered in chuckling tones and juggled cadences, infuse tales of nerdy, middle-class pleasures with rich swagger—while avoiding joke-rap novelty. These guys have nothing but bragging on the brain, but their boasts assume winningly unexpected forms: It takes a truly talented rapper to say the word *hogwash* as commandingly as Inghlish does. Last year’s “Black Mags”—a love letter to BMX bikes set to a flatulent electronic beat—is still their triumph, while the newest song, “What Up Man,” makes a trip to the grocery store in bear slippers sound like a stroll to the hottest VIP in town. Elsewhere, they brag about playing *Street Fighter*, collecting sneakers, eating Fruity Pebbles ... and driving girls crazy in the process. Dorks can dream, can’t they?

DOWNLOAD “Black Mags,” “What Up Man,” “88”

regret, loss, betrayal and hope. And for two-thirds of their debut, they hit the mark: “Don’t Forget Sister” and “Heart Attack” are the kind of *roll down the car window and sing until you’re hoarse* epics that charted weekly in the mid-’80s, before Nirvana and Beck made sincerity seem lame. That wasn’t the fault of sincerity, or even U2; then as now, few singers can extract the Good Bono’s humanity from the Bad Bono’s preachiness. Soon enough, LVD lapse into sanctimonious proclamations disguised as brotherly advice, and the piano ballad “Annie” and meandering “This Is Your Life” emote like an ingénue auditioning for a Tennessee Williams role. Channeling U2 is like wearing a skintight satin dress: It’s glorious if you pull it off, but the material reveals every flaw.

ELIZABETH GOODMAN

DOWNLOAD “Wasted,” “Heart Attack”

AIMEE MANN

@%&! SMILERS

★★★★½

SUPEREGO

Literate, Valium-fogged tales of misery in L.A.—her best since *Bachelor No. 2*

“I thought my life would be better by now”: That’s the most resounding line in string-bean siren Aimee Mann’s latest installment of sour ‘n’ sour adult pop. Delivered in a numbed-out Chrissie Hynde contralto, the narrator could be speaking for Mann, a serial next-big-thing before messy contractual disputes and artistic missteps (viz. ’05’s wearying concept album about a drug-addicted boxer) sucked the

wind from her sails. Yet with its stories of faithless lovers, broken relationships and speed-dealing suburban doctors, @%&! *Smilers* almost seems to feed off the stagnation—every

song is a frippery-free guitar-bass-drums concoction graced with mournful melodies, and Mann’s Raymond Carver-esque detailing and hint of a raised eyebrow subvert first impressions of a

poor-me pityfest. What would her loved-up album sound like? We’ll probably never know.

TONY POWER

DOWNLOAD “Thirty One Today,” “Little Tornado”

JOHN MELLENCAMP

LIFE, DEATH, LOVE AND FREEDOM

★★½

HEAR MUSIC

Indiana’s favorite son makes growing old and dying sound like not much fun

“The former John Cougar put his R.O.C.K. in the U.S.A. proclivities on the back burner years ago (Nashville gives that stuff more punch these days anyway), and by now he’s decided he’d rather be Bob Dylan—recent Dylan, that is, devoted to phlegm-clogged blues-codger grumbles about how he’s ready for his pine box. Producer T Bone Burnett proves a willing accomplice; archaic atmospheres devoid of hooks are his specialty, after all. A drummed suitcase helps give the dirt-road curmudgeon tale “John Cockers” a chunky groove, and “Jena”’s protest against real-life racism in Louisiana feels ominous enough. But only when

Now, that is one sexy Mann!



COOL KIDS: HUY DOAN; MANN: SHERYL NIELDS



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CD WE DIDN'T EVEN UNWRAP

CNOTE
CHIVALRY



Mellencamp lightens up some does he hint at his '80s spark: in a darkly comic midway stroll that swings like "Rain on the Scarecrow" slowed down, and on a duet with Karen Fairchild of country-harmony phenoms Little Big Town, where they hitch a ride with Jesus over some sweet border-country strumming.

CHUCK EDDY

DOWNLOAD "County Fair"

WILLIE NELSON & WYNTON MARSALIS
TWO MEN WITH THE BLUES

★★★^{1/2}
BLUE NOTE

Onstage summit between country and jazz patriarchs brings out the best in both

» Willie Nelson's relaxed talk-singing is so distinctive, and so naturally lovely, and he's depended on it for so long, that falling back on its pleasures might be inevitable. But this collaboration on 10 bluesy standards, tossed off in two January 2007 New York evenings, lures him out of his comfort zone. A trumpet-anchored jazz combo swings Nelson's smoothness into new directions, and he returns the

favor by helping bandleader Wynton Marsalis loosen up. When the singer's overfamiliarity with certain material risks turning him nonchalant, Dan Nimmer's barrelhouse piano picks up the slack; just when you're ready to give up on an uninspired Hank Williams cover, some New Orleans parade funk kicks in. And whenever the lyrics turn to the thrills and chills of the city after dark, Nelson leaves no doubt he knows more than we ever will.

CHUCK EDDY

DOWNLOAD "Bright Lights, Big City," "Night Life"

N*E*R*D
SEEING SOUNDS

★★★
STAR TRAK/INTERSCOPE

Hit producers' side project rewards non-close-listening

» It's redundant to fault a rapper for vanity, but Pharrell Williams is a deeply obnoxious mic personality—his smug self-satisfaction and womanizing jeers thoroughly uninflected by charm, wit or vocal nuance. On the third LP from his band—fellow Neptune Chad Hugo and pal Shay Haley fill out the ranks—his rapping is thankfully

peripheral and the music is a fantastic, distracting mess. The lush and the abrasive jockey for space, often in the same track: "Spaz" and "Anti Matter" tweak the Neptunes' pop squelch to a frenetic, assaultive extreme; and "Windows" and "You Know What" toss in herky-jerky rock and rubbery '80s disco. On the meanest song here, "Yeah You," Williams taunts a pestering girl he has one-nighted. It's more proof that he can go anywhere his ears take him—but it's best when he keeps his mouth shut.

JONAH WEINER

DOWNLOAD "You Know What," "Anti Matter"

ORIGINAL BROADWAY CAST
PASSING STRANGE

★★★^{1/2}
GHOSTLIGHT

Finally, a Broadway musical for people who hate Broadway musicals

» As the plot summary of a Broadway musical, "the European escapades of an alienated black songwriter from suburban L.A. who blows his mind on group sex, hashish and existentialism" beats the hell out of "a blind kid who's aces at pinball" or "costumed cats who dance and sing." Mark Stewart, the semi-successful musical lifer who wrote this semi-autobiography and leads a cast of 11, recounts the pleasures and disappointments of liberation as he romps through foreign capitals where "the enlightened aren't frightened." He sketches the chronology by cleverly changing styles: a punk rant for his adolescence, cabaret for his stay in Berlin. *Passing Strange* is a true rock musical, not just because it has distorted guitars, but because it's funny and manic and brazen about issues of race and culture. This incomplete audio souvenir can't compare to seeing the show, which adds Stew's prickly narration and Colman Domingo's fang-baring comic turn as a pretentious German who's pretentious even for a German.

ROB TANNENBAUM

DOWNLOAD "We Just Had Sex," "The Black One"

PAPER RIVAL
DIALOG

★★★
PHOTO FINISH/ATLANTIC

Simple, scruffy pleasures from Tennessee alt-rock rookies

» Paper Rival's winning debut arrives a full three years after the band formed—a mundane factoid that actually seems quite remarkable in the hyperspeed, doomsday-clock-eyeing maelstrom that is the music industry these days. The



BLENDER APPROVED
THE BEST NEW RELEASES FROM THE PAST MONTHS



COLDPLAY
VIVA LA VIDA

CAPITOL
Chris Martin ditches his neuroses, unleashes his inner adventurer and gets experimental.



MY MORNING JACKET
EVIL URGES

ATO
Kentucky's bearded wonders have a new role model for their schizo jams: Prince!



NINE INCH NAILS
THE SLIP

NINEINCHNAILS.COM
Trent Reznor offers a pack of shiny black bubblegum for free download—proving that Radiohead are cheapskates!



KATY PERRY
ONE OF THE BOYS

CAPITOL
The foxy L.A. pop tart warbles about boys who cry like girls and the girls who love those girly boys.



Wynton Marsalis and Willie Nelson: One of these men is stoned out of his brain. The other is holding a trumpet.

polished *Dialog* demonstrates the palpable benefits of what used to be called "development"—fully formed, mature rock songs with the confidence and chops to detour into lovely little digressions: the swirling crescendo of guitars on "Keep Us In," the soaring falsetto harmonies on the chorus of opener, "Are We Brothers?" On the best songs, singer Jake Rolleston shifts comfortably between tasteful emo (moany standout "The Family Ghost") and tasteful Zach Braffisms (Shins-y single "Cassandra"). All that practice didn't make perfect, but it does make for a welcome surprise.

ANDY GREENWALD

DOWNLOAD "Cassandra," "The Family Ghost"

RATATAT

LP3

★★★½

XL

Brooklyn bedroom tinkers make chill-out rock for cosmopolitan robots

» To call Ratatat "video-game music" is to sell them short.

ASTONISHING FACT!

The prolific **WILLIE NELSON** has fathered children in each of the past five decades: Daughter Lana was born in 1953, and the latest, son Jacob, debuted in 1990.

True, Brooklyn, New York, duo Mike Stroud (on guitars) and Evan Mast (on laptop wizardry) play instrumental rock propelled by a Nintendo-style tapestry of blips and blurbles. But

they also have an almost-Baroque sense of melody and counterpoint, like J.S. Bach gone 16 bit. On their first two albums, both guitar-centric and riff-heavy, the duo employed a tension-release trick that was as predictable as it was awesome—a surging, whooshing soundtrack for power-ups and boss battles. Here they pump the brakes, emphasizing keyboard noodling and atmosphere over raw energy. It occasionally feels slack, especially compared to old faves like "Wildcat" or their bootleg hip-hop remixes. The best moments—like the jungle-beat arpeggios in "Mirando" or Egyptian-flavored "Mumtaz Khan"—have real life to them, a flesh-and-blood heartbeat inside all the pixels.

JOSH EELLS

DOWNLOAD "Falcon Jab," "Mirando" »

Ratatat kinda skimmed on their Daft Punk costumes.



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LUNAR LANDING

HOW ONE CONCERT TRANSFORMED A LONELY SPACE ALIEN INTO A PERVY ROCK IMMORTAL
BY ROB SHEFFIELD

DAVID BOWIE LIVE SANTA MONICA ★★★★★ VIRGIN/EMI

BIZARRELY, DAVID BOWIE has been shy about documenting the 1972 Ziggy Stardust Tour that made him the leper messiah for badly adjusted American kids. The Ziggy concert film was barely watchable, and this long-bootlegged fan fave has never been officially released. But it does for Bowie what *How the West Was Won* did for Led Zeppelin—finally, a '70s crowd-killer gets a properly epic live album. Bowie soars on the energy of the audience, invading Southern California just in time to dance on the remnants of the hippie dream, shouting, “You’re not alone!” at the lost, scared L.A. children left behind. (He might have been soaring on something else too, judging from improvised poetry like “I asked for lobster tail and they brought me palm tree.”) This was the night Ziggy became the rock star he desperately wanted to be.

Ziggy Stardust was Bowie’s first grand persona, a glitter-rocking star child who fell from outer space to make the world a louder, brighter and decidedly sluttier place. But until this gig, Bowie’s first big U.S. tour was no moon-age daydream. He was playing to mostly empty houses (though he killed them in Cleveland, of all places); he’d just performed in New York and gotten dismissive reviews (“songs about Andy Warhol written by an English fairy,” one critic sniffed). In Kansas City, so few fans showed that he reportedly invited them all up front and sat on the edge of the stage until he tumbled off drunk mid-concert. But October 20—a sold-out Santa Monica Civic Auditorium show broadcast on KMET radio—was the moment America met Bowie and fell in love. You can hear it happen—the star and the crowd get louder and chattier as the show goes on, like a blind date gone horribly right. Halfway through, he starts bantering between songs, a little nervously at first (“You’re terrific”), and the girls start screaming, “David!” A couple of hours before, they probably thought Deep Purple was the shit. Now they’re Those Bowie Girls.

The Spiders From Mars were the loudest, sloppiest band he ever had, with pianist Mike Garson and guitar god Mick Ronson taking “The Width of a Circle” and “Moonage Daydream” to new levels. When the Spiders speed up the already-hyper “Hang On to Yourself,” it sounds just like the Sex Pistols’ “God Save the Queen” will five years later. On background vocals, Ronson gets a zero for accuracy yet full marks for gusto—when he and Bowie join voices at the climax of “Five Years,” neither is anywhere near in tune, yet they’re too blissed out to notice. For Major Tom’s rocket launch in “Space Oddity,” Bowie tries to reproduce the engine roar with his voice, a sound that is both deeply silly and bizarrely moving.



David Bowie, 1972: For once, the hair color actually does match the drapes.

Bowie scales his most beatific heights of rock-star egomania for a crowd of flower children who were probably just looking for a place to party. These are the kids Zeppelin wrote “Going to California” about, but Bowie is less coy about his affection for them. He sets out to convince them all they’re as pretty and perfect as the ice-cream-parlor girl in “Five Years,” even if the world keeps spitting on them. It’s strange to remember that most of the crowd is hearing the songs for the first time—he’s giving them non-hits from *Hunky Dory* and *Ziggy Stardust*, both flops at this point, plus unreleased songs (“The Jean Genie”) and obscure covers (the Velvet Underground’s “Waiting for the Man,” Jacques Brel’s “My Death”). “Space Oddity” is the only intro that gets a “Hey, we know this one” clap. Yet the crowd responds to his bravado, the sex of his songs, the promise that golden years are just beginning.

There was plenty of heartbreak ahead for Bowie and his fans—drugs, despair, the Barbra Streisand version of “Life on Mars?” But at this show, Bowie sounds awestruck, and so do the kids, face-to-face with something commensurate to their capacity for wonder. For once, maybe the first moment in their lives as rock & roll fans, they’re not alone. And for once, maybe for the first moment in his life as a lovesick space cadet, neither is Bowie.

DOWNLOAD “Moonage Daydream,” “Five Years,” “Life on Mars?”

WE DIG THROUGH THE CRATES, SO YOU DON'T HAVE TO

D'ANGELO

THE BEST SO FAR ...

★★★½
VIRGIN/EMI

A mid-career stopgap from the once-chiseled prince of neo-soul

► Momentarily, at the turn of the century, D'Angelo was untouchable—an "R&B Jesus," as one critic dubbed him, who could bring women to climax just by flexing his pecs. Eight listless years and about 60 pounds later, he's not the superhero he once was, but that only makes his genius more apparent. A multi-instrumental auteur in the Prince/Curtis Mayfield/Marvin Gaye mold, D'Angelo could play as well as he sang, and arrange as well as he played. (While recording 2000's *Voodoo*, the greasy funk odyssey that provides a too-few five of these 17 tracks, he even gave drumming tips to ?uestlove, which is kind of like schooling LeBron James on how to drive the lane.) This optimistically titled set plays it a bit safe: light on politics and raunch, heavy on love jams, padded with B-sides and soundtrack-cut filler. But the bonus DVD—featuring his infamous near-nekkid video for "Untitled (How Does It Feel)"—provides heat enough for days.

JOSH EELLS

DOWNLOAD "Untitled (How Does It Feel)," "Brown Sugar"

FOREIGNER

NO END IN SIGHT: THE VERY BEST OF FOREIGNER

★★★½
RHINO

Alumni of insignificant bands meet in 1976, sell 50 million albums by recycling the ideas of others

► Before there were American Apparel ads, there was Foreigner's best album cover: It showed a schoolgirl erasing graffiti in a men's john, and it replaced prior

covers of the band's jowly faces. A mix of U.K. and U.S. also-rans, Foreigner embodied corporate rock—by comparison, REO Speedwagon were as flamboyant as Styx, and Styx were as colorful as Journey. But these definitive two discs sum up their brilliance for cheese-puff anthems, though regrettably omitting their great 1979 Brian Eno rip, "The Modern Day." With Mick Jones at the controls (no relation to the Clash guy, but the stepfather of Amy Winehouse producer Mark Ronson), they'd cheerfully mack on any style from punk to gospel to new wave to R&B, using saxophone or synthesizer to vary their hard-rock howling. And "Double Vision" remains one of the few songs to celebrate the mystic-psychedelic powers of beer.

ROB SHEFFIELD

DOWNLOAD "Urgent," "Dirty White Boy"

BILLY JOEL

THE STRANGER—30TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

★★★★
COLUMBIA/LEGACY

After two failed bands and four solo tries, this piano pounder suddenly sold 10 million LPs

► A record where saxophones trump guitars and the piano is nearly the cradle of civilization, *The Stranger* cut against any number of grains in the era just after disco and punk had broken out—this song cycle details a guy dissatisfied with the surrounding mediocrity, but it also takes sanctuary in gentle nostalgia, cocktail-lounge noblesse and the Jersey-guy values of hard work and no bullshit. Today, Joel is Broadway to the bone, but listen to the then-new songs on the 1977 bonus concert disc or check the DVD with a subsequent TV set and you can hear desperation. Don't hate on the Muzak constant "Just the Way You Are"; This is great songcraft and restlessness moving toward and away from the mainstream. It's like a Fountains of Wayne CD fronted by Kevin Costner—you wish the lug singer had a sense of humor, but few have as great an eye for storytelling, detail and melody.

RJ SMITH

DOWNLOAD "Movin' Out," "Scenes From an Italian Restaurant," "Only the Good Die Young"

BO DIDDLEY 1928–2008



BO KNOWS

A BUYER'S GUIDE TO THE RHYTHM KING
BY ROBERT CHRISTGAU

BO DIDDLEY THE DEFINITIVE COLLECTION

★★★★★ GEFEN

► **BO DIDDLEY WAS** the least popular and most avant-garde of the major rock & roll originators. He had only one Top 40 hit—the groove-based comedy record "Say Man," in 1959, well after his magical name and ubiquitous beat became famous. The dozens of origin myths surrounding these two wonders boil down to one: Afro-America. Habanera, hambone, sanctified handclaps, Congo retentions, Chicago playground games, forgotten black vaudevillians, 19th-century street shtick, broom wire nailed to the side of a house—all this and more went into the 20 songs variously compiled as *The Definitive Collection*, released in April 2007.

Everybody knows the beat, a swung three-and-two—like for instance, the Rolling Stones ("Not Fade Away"), Bruce Springsteen ("She's the One") and U2 ("Desire"). The man born Ellas Bates didn't invent that beat. He merely isolated it, orchestrated it and built his own less-is-more, rhythm-first style around it. The archetype is the 1955 R&B sensation "Bo Diddley," which arranges Bo's beat for toms, maracas and his loudly distorted guitar—no bass. Its B-side, however, was unsyncopated: his much-covered Chicago blues "I'm a Man." Three quarters of *The Definitive Collection* reconfigures the beat—for drum kit on "Hey! Bo Diddley," for guitar and voice on the Stones' beloved "Mona," on and on. But it also shuffles, boogies, shouts and rips off the Everly Brothers.

Bo Diddley wasn't one for catchy tunes. So although his big voice was made for electric blues, and his commercial conscience made room for any black pop mode that might sell, the choicest of the 25 additional tracks on the now-download-only *Chess Box* are Diddleybeat variations—"Cadillac"'s sax, "The Clock Strikes Twelve"'s violin—and one-upping routines like "Signifying Blues" and "Say Man, Back Again." Early Bo was the best Bo, and so it goes. The strongest proof of what a powerhouse he remained anyway is the blues-dominated 1984 concert *Bo's the Man! Bo Diddley Live on Tour*. But he was a man until he died of heart failure on June 2.

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BLENDER APPROVED
THE BEST REISSUES FROM THE PAST MONTHS



LIZ PHAIR
EXILE IN GUYVILLE

ATO
Fifteen years on, still the holy grail for geeky indie girls and would-be blowjob queens.



DENNIS WILSON
PACIFIC OCEAN BLUE

CARIBOU/EPIC/LEGACY
Sun-kissed Cali rock with a tragic streak, courtesy of the Beach Boy brother who drowned at age 39.

EVERY ORIGINAL ALBUM REVIEWED

FUNKADELIC

WEARING DIAPERS ONSTAGE, MIXING FEEDBACK GUITAR WITH SONGS ABOUT SEX AND BODY FLUIDS, THEY'VE REMAINED FILTHY FOR 38 YEARS

BY ROBERT CHRISTGAU



George Clinton:
"Do these angel wings make my
feathered chaps look silly?"

>> REFUSING ALL BOUNDARIES like they were hip-pies or something, Funkadelic threatened nightly to "pee in your Afro," while sporting wizard gear, Klan outfits, bedsheets, butt-flapped long johns and diapers. Mad Jimi Hendrix-guitar-yowled "rock." Retarded, bass-heavy beats anchored a low-down, weirdly futuristic funk. Stoned proto-raps and acid-fried post-doo-wop located their voice deep inside ghetto culture. Spawned in sub-Newark Plainfield, New Jersey, come to life in sub-Motown Detroit, Funkadelic were the dark side of George Clinton's ongoing Parliament-Funkadelic franchise. Their 12 studio albums constitute barely a third of P-Funk's insanely varied output. Old-school hip-hoppers sampled them as much as they did James Brown. They are a direct source of Prince, Beastie Boys, Red Hot Chili Peppers and Dr. Dre's G-funk.

ESSENTIAL**LET'S TAKE IT TO THE STAGE**

★★★★★

WESTBOUND, 1975



On the band's tightest album, two of P-Funk's greatest live jams—the title track ("shoulda seen the bull when he funk'd the cow") and "Get Off Your Ass and Jam" (rhymes with "Shit! Goddamn!")—last a total of five-and-a-half minutes. From "Good to Your Earhole" through "No Head, No Backstage Pass" to keyboard virtuoso Bernie Worrell's climactic Bach rip—which begins with a Clinton monologue about dicks and clits—all 10 tracks rock on. **DOWNLOAD** "Let's Take It to the Stage," "Get Off Your Ass and Jam," "Baby I Owe You Something Good"

ONE NATION UNDER A GROOVE

★★★★★

WARNER BROS., 1978



"It was too bubblegum to me. Funkadelic was supposed to be rock," said singer-guitarist Garry Shider of the title track that immortalized Clinton's catchiest catchphrase. And that was only the beginning of Funkadelic's most beloved album, which advised, "Think. It ain't illegal yet," exuded 11 minutes of scatological call and response, and asked indignantly, "Who Says a Funk Band Can't Play Rock?!" **DOWNLOAD** "One Nation Under a Groove," "Promentalshitbackwash-psychosis Enema Squad (the Doo Doo Chasers)," "Maggot Brain"

MOTOR CITY MADNESS

★★★★★

WESTBOUND, 2006



"The Ultimate Funkadelic Westbound Compilation" squeezes 29 tracks onto two CDs. Songs that once seemed forgettable march through like doom in a sequence that dispenses with the fun stuff early so it can get down to hard cases. For those with the heart for it, this is their most listenable album. **DOWNLOAD** "March to the Witch's Castle," "America Eats Its Young," "Nappy Dugout"

GREAT**MAGGOT BRAIN**

★★★★★

WESTBOUND, 1971



The title track is an indelible 10-minute guitar solo: Clinton is said to have instructed Eddie Hazel to play the first half as if his mother had just died and the second as if she had just risen from the dead. Heavy with bass, keyboard and class consciousness, five sour harmony-group meditations ensue, and these generate the nine-minute "Wars of Armageddon," Funkadelic's most incendiary freak-out ever. And for once, all three bonus tracks are plusses. **DOWNLOAD** "Wars of Armageddon," "Maggot Brain," "Can You Get to That"

HARDCORE JOLLIES

★★★★★

WARNER BROS., 1976



Fueled by Clinton's discovery of his kiddie side, the Parliament half of his enterprise had become the Mothership. So to begin Funkadelic's friendliest album, he pumps up the campfire favorite "Comin' Round the Mountain" with the heavy riffing of new guitarist Mike Hampton, forging yet another jam suitable for vamping to the end of the universe. All three love songs are sexy—or all three sex songs are lovey. **DOWNLOAD** "Comin' Round the Mountain," "Smokey"

THE ELECTRIC SPANKING OF WAR BABIES

★★★★★

WARNER BROS., 1981



Reduced to one disc and then buried by a label impatient with Clinton's profligate ways (prudently, he saved the hit "Atomic Dog" for his next deal), this is both strange and professional. A Syndrum-friendly young band establishes Clinton's commitment to an unknown future. "Icka Prick" achieves "equal-opportunity nasty." And Sly Stone turns in his only effective cameo in three decades. **DOWNLOAD** "Funk Gets Stronger (Killer Millimeter Longer Version)," "Shockwaves," "Icka Prick"

CHECK IT OUT

FUNKADELIC

★★★

WESTBOUND, 1970



Dark, slow, tuneless: No wonder this debut was 'bucked and scorned.

A prequel to Sly and the Family Stone's depressive *There's a Riot Goin' On*, it scared the bejesus out of fans of upful blackness on both sides of America's widening racial divide.

DOWNLOAD "Mommy, What's a Funkadelic?" "Music for My Mother"

COSMIC SLOP

★★★

WESTBOUND, 1973



Nearly every song is about a sexual relationship, including one where a pimp gets 10 to 20. A single mother turns tricks "to hide the fact from us that life was really tough," and the wiped-out "No Compute" runs down utilitarian sex on the prowl. Only the lame "Let's Make It Last" could be called positive.

DOWNLOAD "Cosmic Slop"

STANDING ON THE VERGE OF GETTING IT ON

★★★

WESTBOUND, 1974



The title began as a chant favored by rabid fans of the band's crazed shows.

Funkadelic was becoming Clinton's groove band, albeit one open to his wild kinks and prophetic hoo-ha. The title track's pickup line is introduced by chipmunk voices proposing urolagnia. Then comes one of the few pro-gay songs in the pop canon.

DOWNLOAD "Standing on the Verge of Getting It On"

UNCLE JAM WANTS YOU

★★★

WARNER BROS., 1979



This mock-military disco-era effort is best on the two longest studio tracks

they ever released—with ex-Spinner Philippe Wynne scatting. They occupy 25 minutes of a 41-minute album.

DOWNLOAD "(Not Just) Knee Deep," "Uncle Jam"

BE CAREFUL

FREE YOUR MIND ... AND YOUR ASS WILL FOLLOW

★★★

WESTBOUND, 1970



"Let's see if we can cut a whole album while we are tripping on acid," Clinton

proposed. Given how long LSD remains in the body, the experiment took all of one day. Untrammelled guitar workouts followed as down follows up, augmented by the world's first taste of Bernie Worrell's classically trained keyboard commentary and spoken-word pieces unworthy of the title credo, because what isn't? Parse that phrase and you comprehend both P-Funk and life on Earth.

DOWNLOAD "Funky Dollar Bill"

TALES OF KIDD FUNKADELIC

★★★

WESTBOUND, 1976



Their final LP for Westbound was recorded pretty much simultaneously with

Hardcore Jollies, their first for Warners, so naturally Clinton shortchanged the label he was ditching. "Butt to Butt-resuscitation" and "Undisco Kidd" don't justify their billings. The quintessential "Take Your Dead Ass Home! (Say Som'n Nasty)," however, funks shit up for seven minutes. Live, it's been known to hold up far longer than that.

DOWNLOAD "Take Your Dead Ass Home!" "I'm Never Gonna Tell It"

LIVE: MEADOWBROOK, ROCHESTER, MICHIGAN: 12TH SEPTEMBER 1971

★★★

WESTBOUND, 1996



Preserved clearly enough on two-track, these typically or maybe

even atypically free-form versions of second-drawer material with a just-hired, unrehearsed show drummer are all that remain of a storied live ethos that would soon venture further out visually than it did musically. Basically, it's a historical document. It'd be great if there were video from the period. But there isn't.

DOWNLOAD "Maggot Brain"

FOR FANS ONLY

AMERICA EATS ITS YOUNG

★★★

WESTBOUND, 1972



Funkadelic's worst album introduced former James Brown

bassist and living cartoon Bootsy Collins to the ever-changing P-Funk Mob and is dominated by Worrell, thus scotching the widespread and plausible muso theory that his keyboards were what made P-Funk P-Funk. Strewing chaos and screwing his friends, George Clinton was what made P-Funk P-Funk. Here he's so smitten with the quasi-Satanist Process Church of the Final Judgment that he cedes them the liner notes.

DOWNLOAD "Loose Booty"

EDDIE HAZEL GAME, DAMES AND GUITAR THANGS

★★★

WARNER BROS., 1977



True-blue funkateers swear by Hazel, a perpetually troubled

son of Plainfield who proves that African-American rock-guitar wizardry didn't leap generations from Jimi Hendrix to Vernon Reid. But like so many guitar wizards, Hazel needed framing and guidance. Evoking Steely Dan at times, this revered album is one more sideman project only true-blue fans need. Its two best songs were written by the Beatles and the Mamas and the Papas.

DOWNLOAD "I Want You (She's So Heavy)"

BY WAY OF THE DRUM

★★★

HIP-O SELECT, 2007



The exhumed remains of Clinton's late-'80s attempt to take a band

of new enlistees to a new label indicates its up-to-dateness by doing without live bass and drums. Although the title track has some jam, the ploy is most effective when Clinton's son Trey Lewd rewrites Slick Rick's "La-Di-Da-Di."

DOWNLOAD "Yadadada"

FURTHER LISTENING



THE BRIDES OF FUNKENSTEIN NEVER BUY TEXAS FROM A COWBOY

★★★

ATLANTIC, 1979
The best P-Funk spin-off album gives some to the ladies—most prominently, Dawn Silva. It's never been on CD, and the vinyl will cost you several gallons of cosmic slop. But the 15-minute title track is readily downloadable.

DOWNLOAD "Never Buy Texas From a Cowboy"

FURTHER BROWSING



DUKE.EDU/~TMC/PFUNK.HTML

The only decent Funkadelic book, the oral history *George Clinton and P-Funk*, is way out of print. This academic Web site has more hard info anyway—like a list of around 500 records that sample P-Funk.

"DISCOVERING FUNKADELIC IS LIKE HAVING GOD GIVE YOU A GUIDED TOUR THROUGH THE SONIC COSMOS. THEY WERE SO FREAKISHLY CREATIVE AND EXPERIMENTALLY TALENTED THAT THEIR MUSIC IS PERMANENTLY CURRENT."

ANTHONY KIEDIS



PINEAPPLE EXPRESS ★★★

Directed by David Gordon Green. Starring Seth Rogen, James Franco, Danny McBride, Amber Heard, Rosie Perez and Gary Cole

CAREER HIGH

JAMES FRANCO LIGHTS UP HIS BONG AND THE SCREEN AS A DIM-WITTED POT DEALER BY DAVID FEAR



"Don't panic, dudes ... but I think we're out of Funyuns": Rogen, Franco and Danny McBride (from left) in *Pineapple Express*.

THERE'S A POPULAR notion that the way to truly appreciate stoner comedies is to see them while you're in the same mental state as the movies' protagonists. Whether or not you're a confirmed pothead like the heroes of **PINEAPPLE EXPRESS**, you'll probably dig this funny ode to under-the-influence friendships. But given the flick's loopy rhythms and weakness for *whoa, dude!* gags, this is the kind of movie that will provide a maximum return on your 10 bucks if you're baked out of your skull.

Dale (cowriter Seth Rogen) and his dim-witted dealer, Saul (James Franco), have a meaningful relationship: Saul sells the best dope in town, and Dale pretends to be the lonely-shut-in's good pal. Having just procured some exclusive high-grade weed nicknamed Pineapple Express, Dale is in the middle of sparking up in his car when he witnesses a murder. The film then kicks into fourth gear: police chases, fork stabbings, a showdown filled with rampant gunplay and impressively sized fireballs. You know, the usual.

Should the presence of Rogen running around in his underwear and the emphasis on beta-male-bonding not give it away, this is another Judd Apatow project—this time out, the sultan of schlub is the film's producer. You can also credit Apatow for providing *Pineapple Express* with its heart and soul: Franco. A member of the Apatow rep company since the 1999 TV series *Freaks and Geeks*, Franco portrays Saul as somebody who's at once sympathetically childlike, monumentally stupid and absolutely hilarious; he's able to turn a simple confused look into a three-act play.

That a talented director like David Gordon Green doesn't bring more to the party, however, is a bit of buzz kill. Green (*All the Real Girls*) is a highbrow indie filmmaker working in a gloriously lowbrow genre, and you'd expect the combination to **+**

THE EXCITED-O-METER

WE HAVEN'T SEEN 'EM YET ... AND WE'RE NOT EVEN SURE WE WANT TO

VERY EXCITED



VICKY CRISTINA BARCELONA

Woody Allen's new comedy features a love scene between Scarlett Johansson and Penélope Cruz. We're buying a ticket right now.

EXCITED-ISH



STAR WARS: THE CLONE WARS

This animated feature could help wipe away the memory of the last trilogy, assuming it doesn't feature Jar Jar Binks.

NOT SO MUCH



SWING VOTE

Due to a beyond-improbable plot device, Kevin Costner gets to cast the deciding vote in the presidential election. We demand a recount!



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THEM IN THE
THEATER?
CATCH THEM
ON DVD



DOMSDAY
This gloriously
gory tribute to post-
apocalyptic sci-fi is
one guilty pleasure.



THE BANK JOB
A band of tough
guys (led by Jason
Statham) scheme
to nab some loot in
this tightly wound
British heist flick.

foster something original. Instead, Green clumsily toggles between hazy comedy skits and ultra-violent action sequences. The experience of watching this surreal goof is like channel-surfing back and forth between a vintage '80s comedy and a cheesy shoot-'em-up flick. Which, if nothing else, means that the filmmakers understand the movie's target demographic really, really well.

Late-night couch potatoes will also be the ones most likely to welcome **THE ROCKER** (★★½) with open arms; it's the sort of harmless, middle-of-the-road movie that's guaranteed to run on TBS ad infinitum. *The Office*'s Rainn Wilson plays a drummer who gets kicked out of a hair-metal band right before they become huge; 20 years later, he's still bitter. Then the fortysomething loser jams with his nephew's emo-lite band, a naked rehearsal video (don't ask) turns the drummer into a YouTube sensation, and the rejected rocker finally gets the chance to be a golden god. Wilson essentially merges his TV übernerd persona with the self-delusional jackass schtick that's Will Ferrell's stock in trade. Once the novelty of watching Dwight Schrute flip the devil-horns wears off, all you are left with is a lot of believe-in-your-dreams moralizing. Thankfully, *SNL*'s very funny Jason Sudeikis shows up as the band's unctuous manager; every

time he opens his mouth, the film's amp gets turned up to 11.

The only thing harder than being a miserable middle-age adult is being a miserable teenager stuck in the hell we call high school. Nanette Burstein's documentary **AMERICAN TEEN** (★★★) looks at the lives of four "typical" Midwest seniors—a golden-boy jock, a punk-playing misfit, a blond goddess and the nerdiest kid to ever get stuffed into a locker. Watching how their stories adhere to those archetypes (or don't) offers an interesting snapshot of modern teenage angst. The film's mix of personal testimonies, WB drama and onscreen text-message conversations, however, becomes a little too reality-TV-ish for its own good. By the end, you feel like you've just endured a 24-hour *Real World* marathon.

If you were to pick which high-school stereotypes most resembled **BAGHEAD** (★★½) and **HELL RIDE** (★★½), the best answers would be "A/V club member" and "parking-lot rebel," respectively. *Baghead*, Mark and Jay Duplass's deadpan comedy about desperate indie filmmakers making a horror movie about a killer with, yes, a bag on his head, gets by on geeky lo-fi charm until it starts tiptoeing into pseudo-*Blair Witch* seriousness. The makers of *Hell Ride*, a Quentin Tarantino-produced opus about a biker gang, on the other hand, are too blitzed off their own meta-retro fumes to recognize when their badass poses start turning stale. While both flicks get passing grades, neither seems most likely to succeed. ✕

LAST GOOD
MOVIE
YOU SAW?

"IRON MAN:
It's the best
comic-book
adaptation since
the original
Superman films.
Robert Downey Jr.
is at the top of
his game. Like me,
he's getting
better with age."
DIDDY



MUSIC DVDS

JAMES BROWN I GOT THE FEELIN': JAMES BROWN
IN THE '60S ★★★★★½ SHOUT! FACTORY

FUNKY TOWN

THE GODFATHER OF SOUL ROCKS THE
APOLLO, KEEPS BOSTON FROM BURNING
BY RYAN DOMBAL



James Brown:
"The owner of a
powder-blue
Camaro with
Connecticut
plates: Your
lights are on."

"I WANNA LET you know that I'm more than just a man that sing and dance onstage," James Brown announced at New York's Apollo Theater in March 1968. In April, the Godfather of Soul would get a chance to prove it while playing to a volatile Boston Garden crowd less than 24 hours after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., which ignited riots in many of America's biggest cities. "If the concert had not occurred, we would've had the biggest problem in Boston since the Tea Party," R&B DJ James Byrd claims in *The Night James Brown Saved Boston*, a gripping behind-the-scenes account of the gig featured on this expansive three-DVD set, which also includes the Apollo performance and the whole of the Boston show. In the latter, the tragic context turns Brown's every shake, squeal and spin into an act of defiance and loving tribute.

THE BEST OF THE REST

ROLLING STONES SHINE A LIGHT ★★½

PARAMOUNT HOME ENT. This Martin Scorsese-helmed concert movie makes one point, over and over: The Stones are wrinkly relics, but, boy, do they still wail! The offstage footage is unrevealing and, as deftly as the performance is shot, the 21st century is not the best time to watch Mick Jagger undulate in size-28 hip-huggers. **JONAH WEINER**

NEW ORDER LIVE IN GLASGOW ★★★★★½

WARNER BROS./RHINO A nostalgic 2006 Scottish set gives this two-live-DVD package its name, but the real draw is a second disc packed with performances from the synth-poppers' '80s prime. Highlighted by an incredible take on "Ceremony" from 1981, the archival footage reveals why New Order are such an influence on modern electro stars like LCD Soundsystem and Hot Chip. **RD**

DAFT PUNK ELECTROMA ★½ VICE If Daft Punk's recent glowing-pyramid tour showed off the duo's crazed Dionysian side, this art-house atrocity (directed by the French dance gods themselves) veers in the opposite direction—it's a plotless bore that follows two robots (not played by Daft Punk) as they attempt to become real men. This study of the man-machine dichotomy could hardly be more tedious. **RD**

HELLBOY: THE SCIENCE OF EVIL ★★½

KONAMI; XBOX 360, PS3

HELLBOY, INTERRUPTED

THE DEMONIC FUN IS HAMPERED BY A LAST-GEN MENTALITY
BY LIBE GOAD

TECHNICALLY, THIS SOMETIMES charming, but more often frustrating, game is based on the original *Hellboy* comic book, not this summer's popcorn flick *Hellboy II: The Golden Army*. Still, Ron Perlman—the actor who plays the movie's titular hero, a crimson demon with a giant stone fist and a heart of gold—is on board for voice-over duty. But even Perlman's gruff delivery of the fun, cheeky dialogue isn't enough to make up for the fact that the game doesn't amount to much more than repeatedly pulverizing Nazis and wacky supernatural enemies (including suicidal imps with exploding heads and furious samurai ghosts) over and over again. Apparently, your boulderlike forearm is immune to repetitive-stress syndrome.

Unfortunately, monotony isn't *The Science of Evil*'s biggest problem. Although the game looks like a standard Xbox 360 or PS3 title, with nicely detailed, well-conceived characters, its DNA harks back to the previous generation of consoles. Players are at the mercy of a camera they can't control and are forced to take very fixed paths, making the game feel more like a haunted-house ride than an interactive experience. Upon entering a new area, a ghostly barrier forms at the exit in order to keep you from moving on until you destroy a certain number of enemies. Most game makers abandoned this tactic years ago, but it seems even more egregious now in the era of *Grand Theft Auto IV*'s open-ended worldview.



THE GAME PLAY gets even deeper and more detailed on the latest installment of EA's college-pigskin series. Redesigned breakaway moves let players change directions more quickly than ever, and a new audible system keeps opponents from guessing your play calls. Most impressively, there's a 60-season online-dynasty mode, which tests your long-term team-building skills and follows your favorite school through multiple generations of players.



EVERY YEAR, EA must find new ways to captivate gamers with a sport that basically boils down to a bunch of guys turning left for hours on end. This time around, they employ cover star Jeff Gordon to act as your personal mentor and coach, conducting driving tests, suggesting training sessions for trouble spots and—perhaps most important—helping you snag lucrative sponsorship deals from the likes of Target and Office Depot.



THIS OVERLY AMBITIOUS action role-playing game features a plot that sounds like it was ripped straight from a high-school nerd's loose-leaf binder. You are Baldur, the son of Odin, who must fight to defend mankind from extinction. Pick one of five character classes (Bioengineer, Commando and so on) and use magic, speed or sheer brute force to take out cybernetically enhanced Norse gods and their armies.



THROW DOWN AGAINST the Rock Steady Crew's Crazy Legs and other real-life B-boys in this old-school break-dancing simulation. Hit the buttons in the right sequence to pull off freezes, backspins and windmills. The novelty of the game wears off relatively quickly and the graphics aren't terribly impressive, but the soundtrack, which lets you break to the beats of James Brown and Cypress Hill, is suitably fresh.

**BLENDER APPROVED**

THE BEST GAMES FROM THE PAST MONTHS



SOUL CALIBUR 4
NAMCO BANDAI;
XBOX 360, PS3
Guest stars
Darth Vader and
Yoda add a sci-fi
twist to this
stylish martial-
arts brawler.



GUITAR HERO ON TOUR
ACTIVISION;
NINTENDO DS
Rock out in
the supermarket
checkout
line with this
handheld version
of *Guitar Hero*.

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 Lil Wayne Lollipop song1375	 Usher / Beyoncé / Lil Wayne Love In This Club song1376
Bleeding Love - Leona Lewis	song1377
Boyfriend/Girlfriend - C-Side / Keyshia Cole	song1378
Bye Bye - Mariah Carey	song1379
Closer - Ne-Yo	song1380
Customer - Raheem DeVaughn	song1381
Finer Things - DJ Felli Fel	song1382
Forever - Chris Brown	song1383
Get Like Me - David Banner / Chris Brown	song1384
Heaven Sent - Keyshia Cole	song1385
I Got A Thang For You - Trina/Keyshia Cole	song1386
I Kissed A Girl - Katy Perry	song1387
I'm Me - Lil Wayne	song1388
Like Me - Girlicious	song1389
Lolli Lolli - Three 6 Mafia / Project Pat	song1390
Love In This Club - Usher / Young Jeezy	song1391
Never Too Late - Three Days Grace	song1392
No Air - Jordin Sparks / Chris Brown	song1393
Our Song - Taylor Swift	song1394
Party People - Nelly / Fergie	song1395
Pocketful Of Sunshine - Natasha Bedingfield	song1396
Sexy Can I - Ray-J / Yung Berg	song1397
She Got It - 2 Pistols	song1398
Single Again - Trina	song1399
Take A Bow - Rihanna	song1400
The Boss - Rick Ross / T-Pain	song1401
The Time Of My Life - David Cook	song1402
The Way That I Love You - Ashanti	song1403
Touch My Body - Mariah Carey	song1404
Umma Do Me - Rocko	song1405
What You Got - Colby O'Donis	song1406
Yahhh - Soulja Boy Tell Em	song1407
You're Gonna Miss This - Trace Adkins	song1408
Zooted - Soulja Boy Tell Em	song1409

CHART CLASSICS

C.R.E.A.M. - Wu-Tang Clan	song1410
Crank That - Soulja Boy Tell Em	song1411
Crazy Train - Ozzy Osbourne	song1412
Dear Mama - 2Pac	song1413
In Da Club - 50 Cent	song1414
Irreplaceable - Beyoncé	song1415
Me So Horny - The 2 Live Crew	song1416
Ridin' (Ridin Dirty) - Chamillionaire	song1417
Smack That - Akon Feat Eminem	song1418
Smells Like Teen Spirit - Nirvana	song1419
Super Mario Bros.	song1420
Sweet Child O' Mine - Guns N' Roses	song1421
Sweet Home Alabama - Lynyrd Skynyrd	song1422

RIHANNA

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SCENE 1: ORIGINS REVEALED
A SYNQ STUDIOS ANIMATED SHORT

CREATED & DIRECTED BY
YUSNEY GARAY

MANAGING DIRECTOR
AHMED SHEHATA

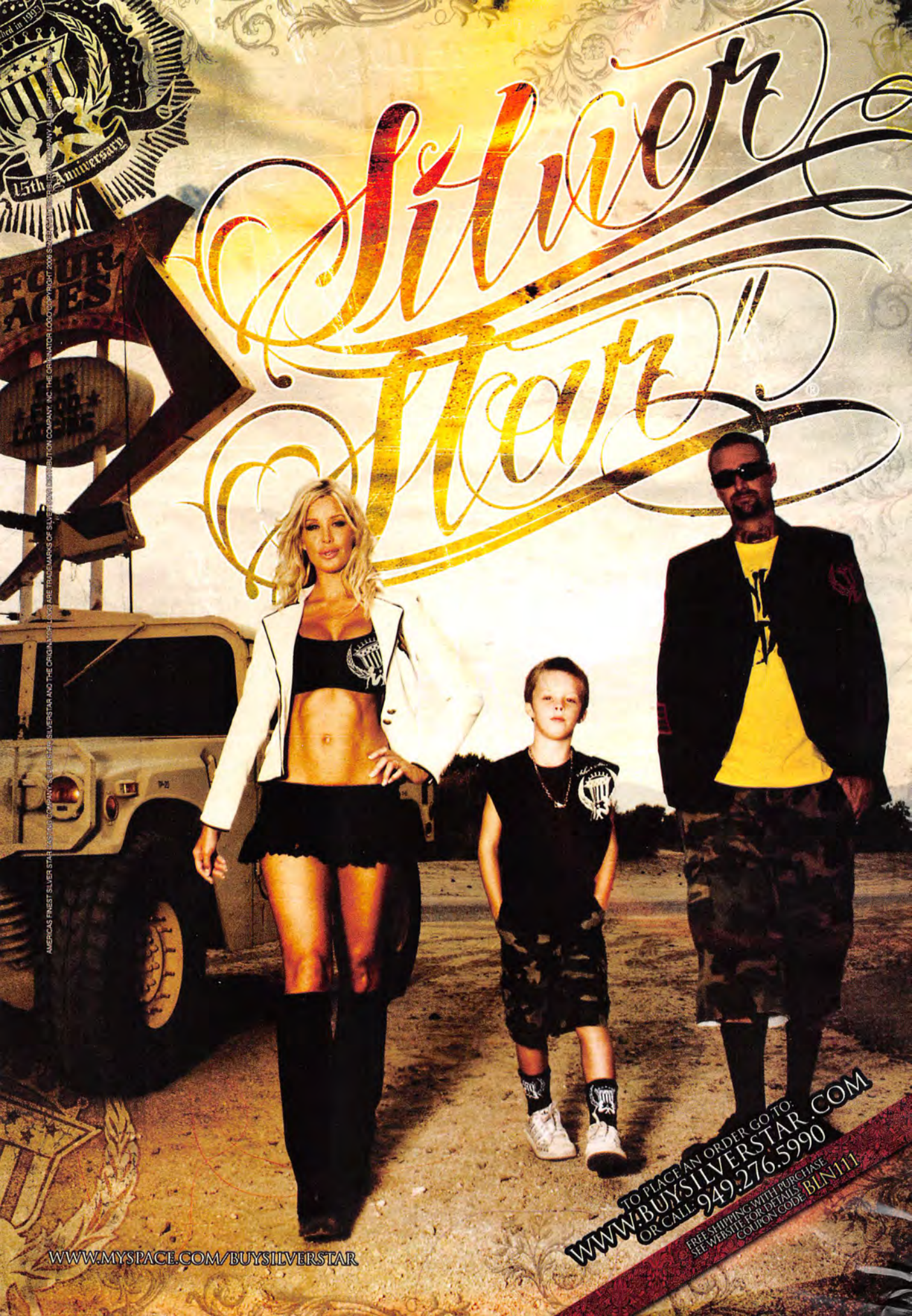
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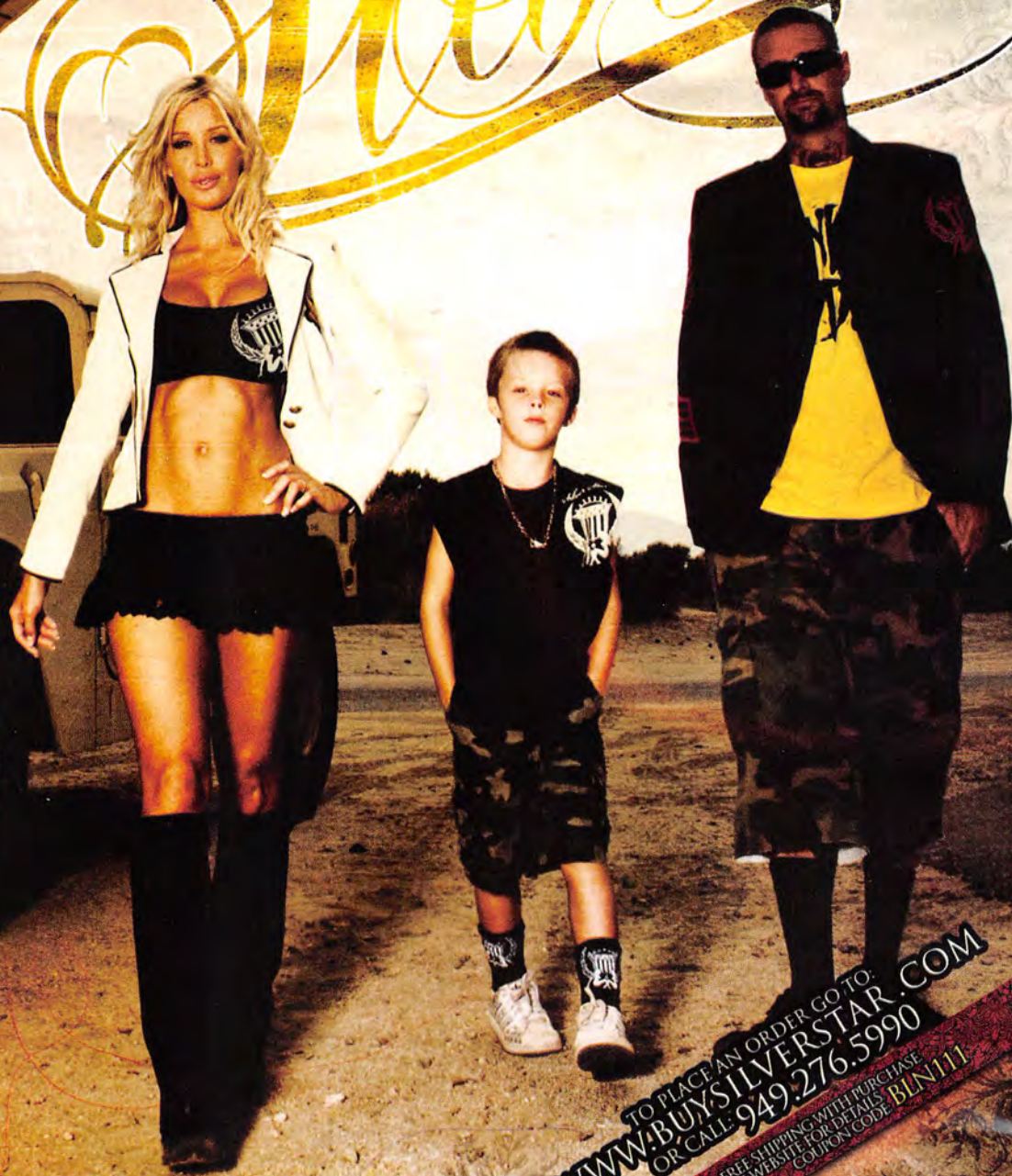


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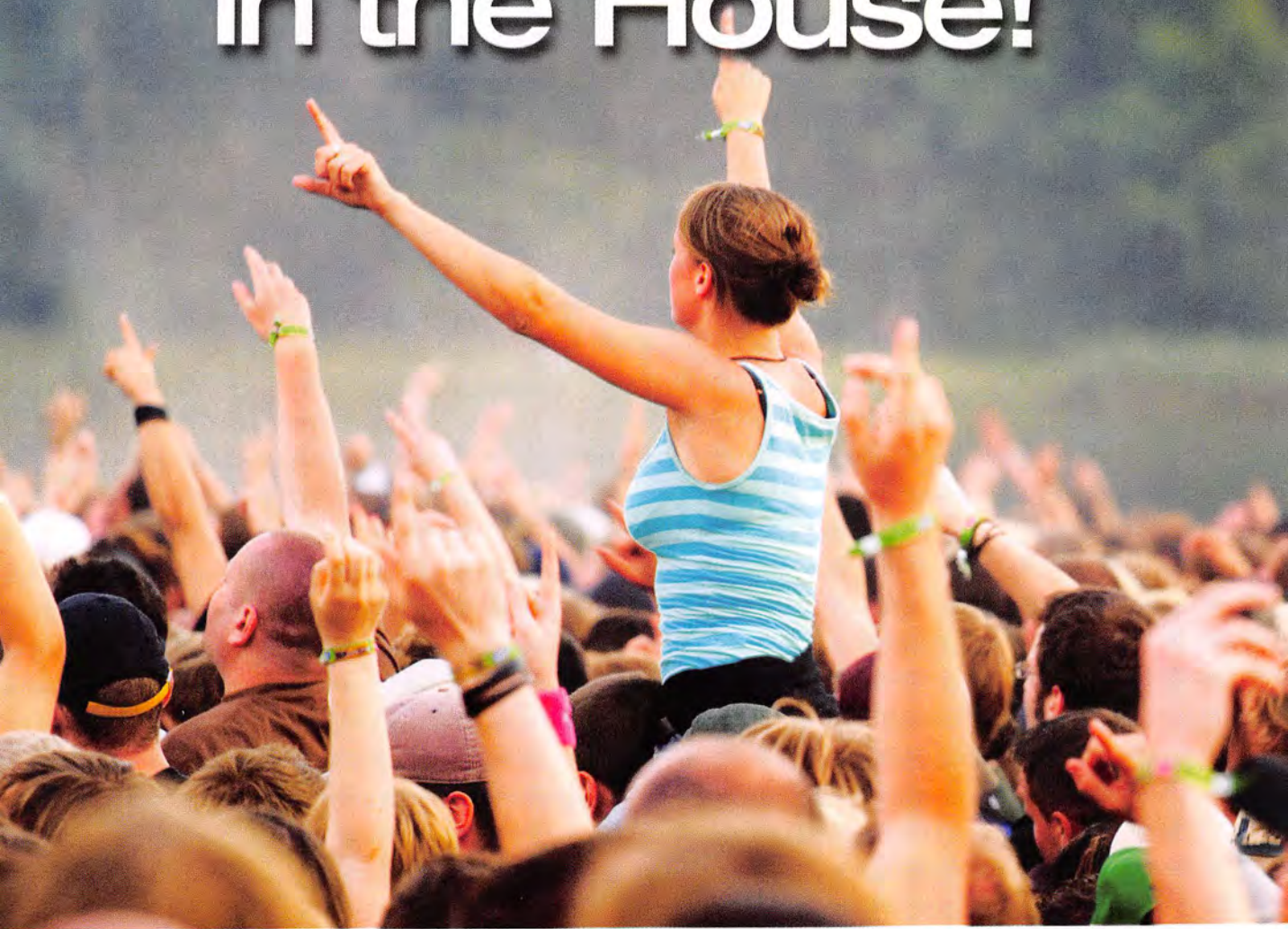
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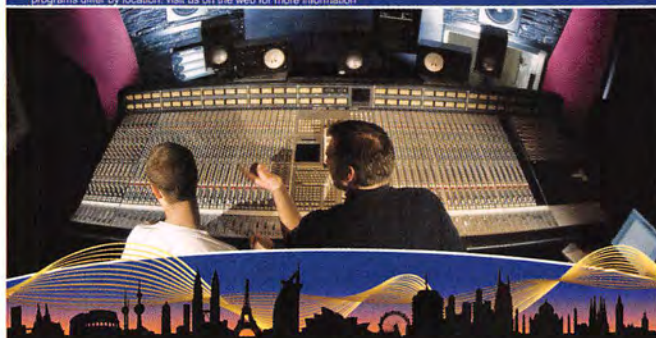
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LAST PAGE

50 CENT'S GUN-TOTING CREW LOVES SEX ON THE BEACH, SMOKING IN THE STUDIO—AND CLAIR HUXTABLE? PUT DOWN THE AK-48, FELLAS, AND TELL US ...

WHO DO G UNIT THINK THEY ARE?

BY JOSH EELLS

PHOTOGRAPH BY MICHAEL LEWIS

➤ **So who drew that self-portrait?**

50 Cent: Banks did. He's the artist of the group.

Lloyd Banks: It stands for T.O.S.—*Terminate on Sight*, the name of our new album. Those are bullet holes, and the black is the blood of the enemy.

➤ **Impressive. Did you take art classes in school?**

Banks: No, but I was always sketching in my notebook when I was supposed to be doing homework. My nickname was Lazy Lloyd.

➤ **Did you guys have nicknames, too?**

50: Boo-Boo's been my nickname since I was 5—my aunt gave it to me. I got made fun of a lot.

Tony Yayo: My real name is Marvin, so I was Marvelous.

Banks: He gave himself that name.

➤ **So it's Friday night at 11 P.M. What are you doing?**

Banks: I be smoking.

Yayo: Definitely. And we're probably still in the studio—we don't get to the club until about 1.

50: I don't even go anymore. It's a job for me now. They'll give me \$60,000 just to do a walk-through. Why would I show up for free?

➤ **Good point. What's the most, and least, money you've made in a year?**

50: The least is probably \$4,000. I wasn't hustling—I was just living at my grandmother's house, eating beef patties for lunch and trying to get by. And the most was the Vitamin Water year. There's a non disclosure

agreement, so I can't talk details, but it was in the nine figures.

➤ **Ever been fired from a job?**

Yayo: I never had a real job. Rapping is my first legal gig.

50: Mine too. Wait, I was a bike courier for one day. I was in a drug-treatment program and they made me ride a bike in Manhattan, delivering packages. That shit was scary.

➤ **Who is your fantasy woman?**

Banks: Halle Berry.

50: Halle's hot. But I'm-a tell you the truth: the mom from *The Cosby Show*.

➤ **Phylicia Rashad?**

50: Yeah, Clair Huxtable. She was gorgeous. Jesus. I met her recently—she's still very attractive.

➤ **How would you characterize your taste in sex?**

50: Adventurous. If I'm with a female who's willing, there are no rules.

We can do it the woods, on the beach ...

Yayo: The beach is poppin'.

Banks: After a certain point, sex is mostly for the woman. You know a man can climax in 60 seconds if he wants to?

50: Sometimes it doesn't even take me that long. Like, if she's really making you anticipate it, or if you watch some "adult entertainment" first. But if you're watching a porno alone, I feel bad for you. You're gonna have to do it yourself.

➤ **Do you like to do it yourself?**

50: Oh, sure. I please me. Don't nobody love me more than me. [BLEND]

"DON'T NOBODY LOVE ME MORE THAN ME." —50 CENT



REMEMBER, PLAYERS ONLY LOVE YOU WHEN THEY'RE PLAYING.

From left: Yayo, 50 Cent and Banks.

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